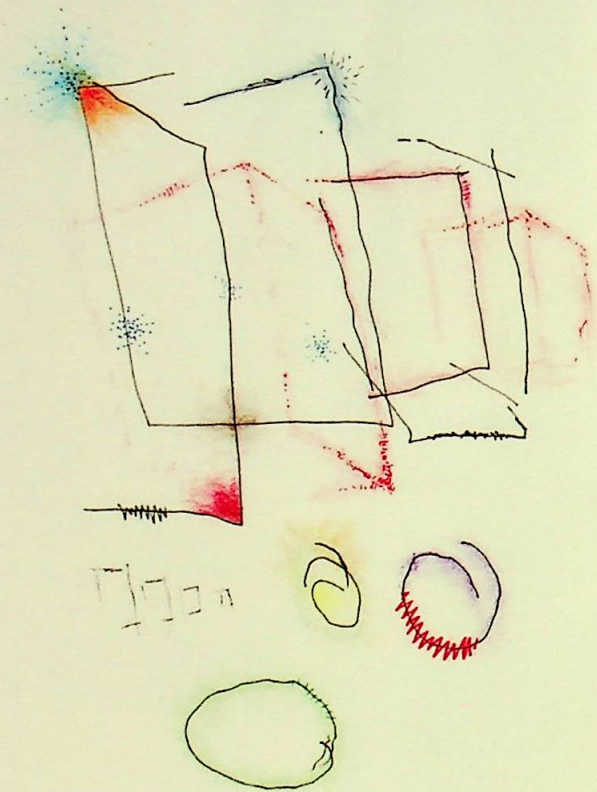
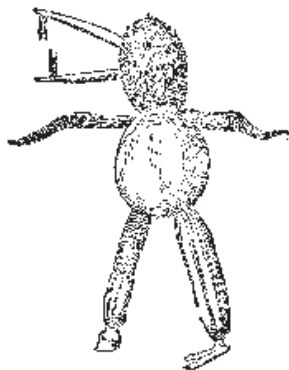


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ENDOWMENT
FOR THE ARTS

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RICKEY LAURENTIIS

Cover art by Dean Young

HURRICANE

Yona Harvey

Four tickets left, I let her go—
Firstborn into a hurricane.

I thought she escaped
The floodwaters. No—but her

Head is empty of the drowned
For now—though she took

Her first breath below sea level.

Ahhh awe & aw
Mama, let me go—she speaks

What every smart child knows—
To get grown you unlatch

Your hands from the grown

& up & up & up & up
She turns—latched in the seat

Of a hurricane. You let
Your girl what? You let

Your girl what?

I did so she do I did

so she do so—

Girl, you can ride

*A hurricane & she do
& she do & she do & she do*

She do make my river

An ocean. Memorial,
Baptist, Protestant birth—my girl

Walked away from a hurricane.

& she do & she do & she do & she do
She do take my hand a while longer.

The haunts in my pocket

I'll keep to a hum: *Katrina was*
a woman I knew. When you were

an infant she rained on you & she
do & she do & she do & she do

FIRST

Kim Hyesoon

The thing that I envy most in the world is your first.
The thing that you envy most in the world—I wouldn't know.
Your first that seeps out from your sleeping face.
The thing that you brought here when you came from there.
I want to cut off your first.
What thing inside your face do I envy?
What thing? I wouldn't know.
Perhaps a thing like the very first milk from your mother who made you.
Your first that is made from such an ingredient.

You open a photo album and look at your first. The first inside the photo is probably thinking of you. Thinking that it is thinking of you. Your beloved first is hiding inside the photo but your wrist floats the train on top of the open field of the computer keyboard and touches each train car *chut, chut, chut, chut*. Your *chut*. Where is it hiding? Your first that is shy and hot as steam from mommy's milk that spouted into you long ago. Your first that shuddered lump and became your body. The tickle you felt when you met your first like when a flock of geese flies into the sunset. Because you are now writing a farewell letter to me, your first is laughing quietly? Perhaps it is thinking harder about you inside the photo? Your first terrifying solitude that used to crouch and hang onto the inside of mommy's tummy. First love that used to share and eat such solitude. There is a knife inside the hearts of all the firsts of the world. There is nothing that is more heartless than first. First always dismembers. First forever dies. Dies in an instant as it is called first. A wedge of your lipflesh that first has severed then runs away. *Chut, chut, chut, chut*. Your two wrists without a body run alone above the train tracks of the keyboard, you and your first. A dog with two necks barks and roams, searching under the

hazy moon. The forgotten didn't know it was forgotten. Died. Your first is dead. First that still flaps about inside your temple.

Your first, my first, firsts that part forever.
I approached you as if
I were meeting you tonight for the first time
and had lost my first.
Did you also?
Then shall we hold hands and kisskiss?
Should I say it like that?

And at that time your first is the *kkût* [the end], *kkot* [the flower],
kkô ôk [the snap].
Died. D e i d. Dide.
Shall I say it like that?

Translated from the Korean by Don Mee Choi.

FAB, BETA, EQUITY VOL

Joshua Clover

Option-ARMs and the man I sing who first
came from Detroit-Berlin into Black-Scholes

flight to liquidity flight to safety flight to quality

Real city derelict house derelict storefront
ostalgia for the productive forces
dude that's not emptiness it's abstraction
asserting itself on the home front now
who will love in your hollowed carapace

Dilution of violence and grief
spread over centuries to come
a lamentation congealed and spent
in the orgiastic present

credit is a form of fortune
telling that is always right
except in what kind of story

“The engine of history”
arose as a phrase
in a blue century long
afternoon before this
motordämmerung now
the velocity of risk
passing through us
and coming out as
filter disco ghettotech
panta rhei of finance being

The world which extruded six story apartment blocks
and warehouses of brick and filthy glass which made
making and finally faded when we used the word
real behind the back of consciousness we meant *that*
we meant industry and the industrial age you want
a total philosophy well there is my metaphysics

from ONE LIFE

Muriel Rukeyser

One Life is Muriel Rukeyser's largely forgotten verse biography of Wendell Willkie, an Indiana-born lawyer who lost the presidential election to Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1940 but was recruited by FDR in 1941 to serve as U.S. ambassador at large. In that capacity, Willkie fought against imperialism and racism and advocated a "One World" vision for worldwide peace and social justice. He attracted Rukeyser's attention because, like other subjects of her life-studies (Willard Gibbs, Thomas Hariot), he was incapable of being pinned down—to one party, one ideology, even one attitude. This section is excerpted from part 2 of *One Life*, "Tree of Rivers," and it showcases Rukeyser's poetic genius. Here Rukeyser introduces Paul, a German refugee, to represent what she calls in the foreword a "universal child." He is not imagined, but an actual historical personage at the Vassar nursery school—Rukeyser based Paul's conversations on transcripts his teacher sent her. His inexplicable presence in a biography about Wendell Willkie suggests new ways of thinking about how poetry might deal with history and politics.

—Eric Keenaghan

~::~~

In a song, in a clear look, the heat and blood of history may come, through a child, to us all. The enormous dams, the dome of the Capitol, are now no larger than the dream of a child: in the hot clover, through the dream-corn of a boomtown, running, in Indiana summer; or, later, another boy, a four-year-old, with the bells of the great dreams going through his blood also.

Rang and rang, rang in a small boy's head.
A child goes through the same course: the meanings and
knowings.

~::~~

A man riding on the meaning of rivers
Sang to me from the cloud of the world:
Are you born? Are you born?
My name is gone into the burning heart
That knows the change deep in the form of things.
—I saw from the tree line all our cities shine.
A woman riding on the moon of ocean
Sang to me through the cloud of the world:
Are you born? Are you born?
The form of growing in leaf and crystal flows,
And in the eyes and rivers of the land.
—From the rock of our sky, I came to recognize.

A voice riding on the morning of air
Sang to me from the cloud of the world:
Are you born? Are you born?
Bring all the singing home;
There is a word of lightning in the grass.
—I stood alive in the young cloud.

~::~~

A STORY

There is a child. He comes from far. By boats and trains, cities
that move, houses that sail away. He comes from the country of war to a

field at peace. Daylilies, yellow daisies, Queen Anne's lace. A barrel, a box of sand. He is four years old; he looks up into Miss Lorence's eyes. Many children, playing.

CHILD:	Look, look!
MISS LORENCE:	Yes. I'm looking.
CHILD:	I'm way up in the sky!
SECOND CHILD:	Moo, moo. I don't like you.
CHILD:	I do magic.
SECOND CHILD:	What magic?
CHILD:	Want to see?
	I do magic very well.
	Step there. Put one foot there.
	Now I need the latter.
	Hold it! (To the young woman)
	What's your name?
MISS LORENCE:	Miss Lorence. What's yours?
CHILD:	Paul.
MISS LORENCE:	Paul is slight, Paul is small, Paul wants to feel, he wants to smell, He wants to taste, to see, hear. Everything. He is slight, his eyes blaze blue, White-skinned, cocky, knobby, as Fragile as a closed-down spring.
PAUL:	Where is father?
MISS LORENCE:	Far. Your mother does not know. It is the war. It is the war.
PAUL:	Who is Hitler? What is sound? How does it feel to die? What does a worm think? Miss Lorence? How long does it take to grow up?

Miss Lorence—I will talk to you.
The little house I like, the kitten I like.
It went to a little wood, to a little Paul,
When it came to Paul it cried.
In a basket, like Paul the baby, in far land,
To Paul's father. The father of Paul
Kissed the kitty and cried.
Unhappy was he. Why is he?
Because I have no kitty, because the father
Of Paul is in a far country.
Not in this town is he,
Not in this house,
Not in the room or the bedroom.
Far away, far away. When will he come to us,
When will we be happy, seeing him company?
Not for long, for long, for long.
Cry we, for it is a long time, and far away.

ANOTHER DAY

MISS LORENCE: The child among his powers gathering
His words, his rich articulate joys and fears.
They are our fears, our joys, the questions of all.
His creations are real. His agonies
Are curiously related to the trouble of the people
of the world.

PAUL: There was a boy once, lived in a little house.
A big man came, started eating and eating.
He got to the boy, boy said, Dog, dog save me.
Dog jumped the ocean and saved the little boy.
Then they lived together.
The giant was discouraged.

After a while he saw his mother. Yawn I.
A man came and ate up the little pig.
How discouraging! How sad!

Discouraged little pig.
I am tired. Rest I will.

ANOTHER DAY

PAUL: And then the cow did write.
His mother said sleep, sleep,
The other cows are outside,
You have been bad,
More than the black cow,
More than the white;
Go to sleep.
You are a baby cow.
Your father is in the creek.
I had no home and I cried
Master, master!
I want some water or I will be sad.

ANOTHER DAY

PAUL: I will now sing a song for you, Miss Lorence.
Will you write it down?
MISS LORENCE: Yes. I'd like to.
PAUL: No. I cannot sing today. My songs are tired.
They are unhappy.
MISS LORENCE: I can write down your unhappy song.
PAUL: No. You sing me a song.
MISS LORENCE: Shall I sing Sacramento? Buckeye Jim?

PAUL: No, no. You must not sing those songs.
Sing your new song. About me.
Sing about that grown-up downstairs
Who lives in a tree.
MISS LORENCE: Who lives in a tree?
PAUL: The man with the grass in his lovely hair.
The wild, happy man, with the bears,
and the large scamper.

~::~~

MISS LORENCE: The words are masks, the words are a stream;
they mask his open fears. The apprehensions
stand there.

~::~~

PAUL: I don't want to rest. Once upon a time there
was a Miss Lorence, who was going away,
away, away, away. Don't go away to
leave me. Sit on my bed not to leave me. A
skylark am I, wildly I walk, walk, walk, walk.
Mittens here in my bed.
There. I bit you, but I love you.
When you die you stop. Don't really worry,
dear you.
I do not really die. Do not believe anything I
tell you,
Or unless you really see.
Sometimes I joke.
This is school. Not sky, not home, but school,
school, school.

What is my shadow? It is me,
But not a mirror.

ANOTHER DAY

PAUL:

You sit there because I like to look at you.
I would like to live with you.
Why don't you come live with me?
This little fish went in the water,
But there came a boat and smack,
Killed at once.
That is the end of my story.
Which is a love story, Miss Lorence.
What do you know about love, Miss Lorence?
Once upon a time there was a big, big, big man.
A zero man.
I dreamed about the school and people.
Miss Lorence was a snowman.
I dreamed about me, sleeping in a box
Because I had no house.
And we cried.
I dreamed about a hundred miles on a boat.
And the boat went on swimming in my head.
Wicked witch. Pony. Zero. Clay.
All my head is gone.
Shot off by a gun.
Your head will be gone too
If the men, the men, the men shoot you.
It will be too bad when your head is shot off.
You are a dear little baby.
Once there was a man called Jew
And he was chased and he was shot

And he ran but he was shot
Wee Willie Winkie.
—Antonia, you are a zero.
Have you ever “rapping at a window, tapping at
a lock,” Miss Lorence?
I am a quiet little boy because I must be quiet.
Come sit beside me, Miss Lorence.

~::~~

They talk to each other, and he holds her hand. The small, knotty
boy, with a young woman bending over him, curved and evocative, giving
him his rest and his stories as November deepens.

~::~~

PAUL: Miss Lorence, you are a tree with leaves on,
A strong stone, a brook. Look,
Water running in brooks, in brooks, in brooks,
Which are purple and white streams,
Screens, screams and cries and loud noises.
Oh, what a singer am I.
Little songs and cries.

I want to want to want to get up.

But I will sing a loo a loo a loo.
The old man named Loo
And he went to an eye
And he lived in the eye.
What a lot he could see.
Once upon a time

There was an end of my story.
I do not like the black sky.

~::~~

His gay words, words of delight. But the real fears, the questions,
the real real emerging. Father, Hitler, war, shooting, Jews, death, safety.

~::~~

PAUL: What do you write?
 Write me a song.
 What about? The fish I do not know.
 —The man had little streams.
 And a bright pain.
 It was bright when he pushed
 With a noise and a bar.
 A tooth. With a hole.
 There can be holes in the ground,
 Can there be holes
 In the white sky?
 The sky is a tree. It spreads.
 Does it hurt the ground to have holes?
 Why, the sky was white.

~::~~

PAUL: Do you know Hitler? Does he like you?
 I know him.
MISS LORENCE: Do you?
PAUL: He doesn't like me. He shoots people.
MISS LORENCE: Why doesn't he?

PAUL: Because—I don't know.
I lived away over the river.
MISS LORENCE: In Germany?
PAUL: I lived in a million houses.
My father is in Krieger land.
Not this land, not this America,
But a Krieger land.
That is a land of guns.
That is a shooting land.
I remember the dogs in the park.
Far away. I remember.
That park we saw the dogs.
When we went home again
We stepped the leaves apart.
I want to get up.

~::~~

ANOTHER DAY

PAUL: Miss Lorence, we are new to each other,
Because I have not been to you for long, for
long, for long.
You are a dear little tree.
Sit by me close.
I am a little horse who is going to sing.
Such a lot of songs I have to sing,
For I have not been to you for so long.
Did you ever have a red pain
In your throat? Mine was, it was mine.
Now I am here I can sing to you
A little song all for you.

You make me happy.
Shall I say it in German, in French?
No. I will not.
I will just say it to you in talk.
It is a little song about me.
I am happy with you, happy like happy
At birthday candles
And little gold shoes
That Jesus wears.
Little gold shoes.

~::~~

Yes, a nice child. Isn't he a nice child?

~::~~

ANOTHER DAY

PAUL:	You can't come with us. We have business to do. We have to go over to Germany But we'll be back in a minute. We have to go to Hitler's land To shoot him. But you are a lady so you can stay home. Men take care of ladies.
MISS LORENCE:	Who are you going to shoot?
PAUL:	Hitler of course, the bad wolf. If you are in trouble with Hitler you'd better not come on the ferryboat. If you are don't come here with us,

You'll make more trouble than we have.
Are you a Jew?
It's being Jews that makes the trouble.
It makes people worry.
Are you Jew?

MISS LORENCE:

No.

PAUL:

That is why you are not worried. That is why
you are happy.

~::~~

His father is lost and away. Paul never asks for help or sympathy. He is detached and proud. Now, around New Year's Day, he stops being Paul. The brittle four-year-old turns into something else: the farthest he can imagine, the oldest he can travel. He announces to everyone that he is Timmy Torin, he is nine and can do anything. He is his own hero. And his father is lost.

~::~~

PAUL:

My name is Timmy Torin.
I can do more things when I'm bigger.
You like me big don't you?
If somebody was lost I could find them
Any time my mommy tells me or you tell me.
I'm a very big boy.
I'm not afraid.
You know about Jesus, little Lorence?
Some day I will tell you all about Jesus.
My father is dead, he is an angel.
When you are blind you cannot see but black.
When you are blind, it is like you are nothing

And are dead. How is that?
Somebody says, When you are dead you are
stopped.

And other people say
You go to the sky and watch and sing.

Miss Lorence, I am tired.
You can have one of my blocks.

BEHIND THE CHRISTIAN DOOR

Lillian-Yvonne Bertram

And when is the state gonna pay us? And
when is the state gonna pay us? And when is
the state gonna pay us? And when is the
state gonna pay us? And when is the state
gonna pay us? And when is the state gonna
pay us? And when is the state gonna pay us?
And when is the state gonna pay us? And
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state gonna pay us? And when is the state
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state gonna pay us? And when is the state
gonna pay us? And when is the state gonna
pay us? And when is the state gonna pay us?
And when is the state gonna pay us? And
when is the state gonna pay us? And when is
the state gonna pay us? And when is the
state gonna pay us? And when is the state
gonna pay?

THE SERVICE ECONOMY'S ECONOMY

Alan Gilbert

A vacant lot is the playground where
hungry ghosts prepare their meals
using discarded microwaves and watery
wine cooler bottle shards.

Wow, that's a big toxic spill.

Some mammals escape through the office building's
rotating doors; others squeeze through
the writing center's portholes.

The bank still won't cash my check
from the street fair's inflatable carousel
after we ate with our elbows and assisted
the blowtorches and spring planting.

Otherwise, it's gymnastics
with knees firmly stuck to the petroleum floor
while pretending to elude the chalk-outline
authorities.

The surveillance cameras record without words,
so we tried to confuse them with the scratch 'n sniff.

What's wrong with a little bit of good daddy?

This poem is like a birdcall
that also attracts the cat,
as some pain never gets taken away,

but instead slips in its orbit—
same hammer, different nail.

All my loves are outside that door,
but all that history comes inside.
I get restless with feeling restless,
and occasionally apologize for wanting more.
Welcome to the big anti-,
to ones and twos, to the difference
between chicken fingers and feather fingers,
and a bake sale held to help elect a new president.

Wait, wait, I'm not done yet.
The image-shades pursue us
while hiding the somnambulists' map behind
everything lost or damaged in the move.
The leash stretches from here to DC,
though the dog hair is our own where the machines
chomp down with mostly molars and we grab at
serrated knife points combing the warm sand.

Sometimes we learn last,
as wind and waves blow off the East River
for another summer and wrap us in red curtains
during musical chairs without sound or seating.
In a previous life, I was reincarnated
as Long Island.
Forests intrude on our ears—
the organ slowest to acknowledge good-bye.

A blanket of plastic pinwheels spins in the night,
but we breathe so quietly beneath it
when we're at peace.

It's the house that best fits our back
on a street lined with aluminum siding
because I'm not nostalgic for much of anything
except the future and maybe that smudge
you left on the sun.

WHAT FALLS IN THE POOL

Joshua D. Lickteig

sapling feather, bark
net in my hoop

at a ballplayer's mansion or
maybe that of

a god-like philanthropist
bubbles surface

from the movement
of the lever of the depths

pine pins pierce lily-
pad bridges

a billy goat
on the diving board

KILLZONE2

Joyelle McSweeney

Up on the wire, the young body
Makes a bend like a wave with its body of knowledge
Then makes a bend like a lens. Thought and light,
Those carcinogens, make eyes
Through hard plastic at the fetal body.
For I am the Thought and the Light
For I am the Wire and the Lens
Looped with estrogens. Like the evening news
It's over. And it's over and over again.
Before the candy can crush the crowd
The cop shoots the piñata with his service revolver.
Just shoots the pants off it. Shoots it right in the paint.
So it's over, it's all over
The crowd, the crowd
Makes a spasmody
Scrums for candy
In a series of balletic gestures
Seized from the sixteenth c.
From the sixteenth arrondissement
Of my love for you from the sixteenth chamber
Of my heart
Multiplied
In that chamber
I take a bullet
For every member of my team
A learned violence from the game of the year.
An exercise in teaming and gaming
Followed by relentless sleep

In my femur trailer.
If you think there's a moral here,
Or a femoral artery, a Pasteural,
Good news, you missed it, you're missing it.
You're missing the morale boat
The boost
The boast
The shot
The overall thrust
At the throat
Of the heart.
It's a service game.
It's the year for it
Here where the young body eyes itself
On the Jumbotron of the Ox.

HANIOGRAPHIES 2, 3, AND 4

HANNIE OAKLEY: Hannie Oakley OK go to countdown! I had a sunlit lariat which lipped the miles, smiled at the zero line, poured as from a very goblet, smiled a honey harelip that sky-wrote over the crowd precise as sciatica, that sky-wrote the crowd its lines. OK so they were reading ‘em off I was reading ‘em everywhere. I said OK, I have this new seletrix typewriter and it can only go three ways—bold, plain, and underline; canal road, silk road and this country highway of mine, wild-groomed and with a coy tiny shield numbered with a letter, and if you catch my drift they came down to it and set their toots on the zero line like the cutest and smallest of pox. Now in our show there was an Indian name of Sitting Duck and he addressed the crowd with all the gravity of a three teepee powow or a three martini lunch, and as a second act he put on the Fudd-cap and toted his own smoking gun: I’m hunting raaaaarebit! Sitting Dunk’s first white meal was icecream, he ate it in the parlor of the saloon without so much as a by-your-leave, as if he was borne to it, and then he got up and shot the sheriff in the back, as if he was born to that, and then he shot the bank dick who had wandered in from another scene, and then we hightaled it out of there and put the ski in skeddaddle. On the back of the lame train, heading east, which was half full of water, which we had to help row, Skinning Bull yanked his buffalo robe around him and raised his eyebrews superciliously and let out a cheroot knot of wisdom. He said: Hannie Oakley, my time is done. The great spirit done dropped a dime on my ass, and I’ll spend the rest of my days singing in the big house like some profane canary. Then he put his hand out for a handout. He wouldn’t say nothin more, just sat there with his paw turned up and his thoughts rising silently like dollar sign smoke signals, and I went on snaring ‘em with my lariat and clappin ‘em on paper. Where the powder marked the paper that was a sign, it cleaned my aura out like yogurt and electricity, shook the bullets down out of my bandoliera, the piñon out of my piñata, the Kahlo out of my Frito Lay, until it all lay in a smoking heap you had

to sort through, half dead twice from the fire and the mouldering, which added up to wholly dead. At the next big city I smuggled Sitting Dog up to my suite in the guise of a bear rug and we speant three days supping in a porcelaina clawfoot, watching the white lepers leap from my boottoe, just as quick shootin 'em off.

HANNIE OAKLEY: Okie go to countdown! Funking down that city street was Ole Two-button Ron, Ron Silver, his snakeskin boot-toes upstuck and hissing through split tongues like reverse magnets: repell repell. Lint collection agency, swomp. There was a seal on his trousers. Threadgolden bare arches. We were at a crossroads, at a gallery, a carwash, at a fashion show, in a dentist's office, and we were there for the art. On rolling chairs, we severally forded, no metal could be touched or touch us, which was adverse to properties, which was impropitious. I kicked off from linoleum, my hands plied the vinyl rests, and as I neared him, I held forth the colander at my breast. This for thee, Ron Silver, this for thee, I said, depositing the catch-all, and sailed on, and from his salient glint in passing I knew him for a teacher. Thereafter we were tethered in that lofty way, exposed beams, naked piping, a gain elevator that knew its own shaft, wisely, we would climb on, and as the clatter began canticles slid by on shrieking chains and ligatures and Ron Silver's heart twopucketttwo-puckettwhankthwank charged a seletrix of its own with meaning. It was a unit of breath and life. It was a unit of strength. Magnitude. Ocularity. No one drove me to that length. That long pier where I have driven to the end of and someways off. This chain gang. I wear now I wrought in life. It's made of frog legs. Pied de cochine. Cartridges. Tenebrae (spent arms). Tuberroses. Ron Silver gave me a sad look from the top of his saguaro headress. From his spread breastplate of ostrich cock. It sagged as he turned away, lost altitude. It took a wingspan to support it. A lifespan. A mortal armature. A varminture. It withdrew. It (Ron) was gone. Then I walked with a dripping handwring the length of the apartment and Ronagain was in the impression, ronsilver was the lick in each drip, and

he diffused and lit out for the corners as if for the territories, and what he had writ in his will arrived by air messenger, later that week, and read: That's enough now, Hannie Oakley, good page.

HAMMIE OAKLEY: Here's a theory of performance for you: aim for the rafters. Shoot the room. Aim for the kids in the back. That's an old marksman's canard, that's the canard line. Then shake your smoketrace ringlets; look cute. Ethel Merman apparently did not take kindly to being taken for Jewish but she did take kindly to being taken for Hannie Oakley and that sharpshooter trickride companion compact mirror Jewess is myself. I'm not one of those that imports a parasite to lose a little weight, tapes a trickworm in my saddle, or oneups over the chinbar of a radio flyer to splay dadside up in a puddle. Po, po Hannie Oakley, they all said. They said, oh, po sugar, do not die. Ok. Didn't. Choroform to revive you, tincture of Ethel Merman for your saddly side, next thing you're up and struttering around the three ring like who killed corked robbin boots of spa-a-anishletherr plus the red shoes times two divide by three. My resurrection was diabolical, the remainder stuttered and would not be snuffed out, the candle swung dangerously low and hairy. It showed it had a hairy side. I turned my chin to the spirit picture, spoonshovelmoon-wide, to the stirrup picture, needlespittleleaside and then I cut to the chase meanwhile back at the ranch I didacted, autoretracted. It's exhausting, licking these stamps, sitting at my secretoire with my serotype without a secretary in sight and can't keep a secret to save my life. Keep it from who. Spilled it silent. Just surviving this was a chitlin circuit flangebanged worth staggering the ranch. Friends, I was laced, then disbarred. Disbarred and disarmed I lay in the shallow of the shag carpet and let the scuttlebutt drag over me like the anchor of a lance. That's when I heard the swar in the wilderness. The small chip-chirrupping like grinding of machine.

JUBILATE AGNO SCRIPT

CREATED AND PERFORMED BY MADELINE FFITCH,
KELIN LOE, BEN HERSEY, NATHANIEL OTTING, AND
JONO TOSCH, ON THE OCCASION OF THE 2010 JUNIPER
FESTIVAL IN AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS.



CHARACTERS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Horned Bearded Actor
Puppets
Bureaucrat
Christopher Smart
First Voice
Second Voice
Voice of Samuel Johnson



(The set is an eight-foot-tall, two-dimensional head in profile, painted white and covered in handwritten text. The head is full of windows and doors, and it is already in motion—its moving parts revolving, and music playing. White balloons covered in script are inflated out of its mouth. Audience members are each armed with a sharpened pencil.)

(Lights out.)

(Sustained note.)

ALL

O YE TONGUES!

(Sustained Note. Lights up on HORNED BEARDED ACTOR, who opens window in head to reveal a congregation of horned puppets. They all open their mouths at the same time, and joyfully make this same sustained note.)

HORNED BEARDED ACTOR

For the head will be liable to less disorders on the recovery of its horn!

PUPPETS

A beard is a good step to a horn!

HORNED BEARDED ACTOR

The shaving of the face was the invention of the Sodomites to make men look like women!

(Lights down.)

(Lights up on BUREAUCRAT who hangs "Keep Off the Grass" sign on side of head, then crosses opposite to desk with index cards. Begins to sort through them. Spectacles, ledger, the like.)

BUREAUCRAT

To be avoided: A little child with a serpent. Dead child out of the womb. House on Fire. Life without locomotion. Porcupine, the. Ready to pinch. Scorpion, the. Tombs, the.

(BUREAUCRAT turns to next card.)

God loves it: a little child with a serpent (see also: to be avoided).

(BUREAUCRAT turns to next card.)

Recovery of its horn (See also: body parts): Stars have satellites.

(Lights down.)

(Lights up on CHRISTOPHER SMART encountering “Keep off the Grass” sign.)

CHRISTOPHER SMART

One can travel for the glory of God without going to Italy or France. I’ve adventured myself in the name of the Lord, for I can meditate the peace of Europe amongst family bickerings and domestic jars. They throw my horns in my face and reptiles make themselves wings against me. I was a Viper-catcher in my youth and the Lord delivered me from his venom. There are still serpents that can speak—God bless my head, my heart, and my heel. I am like a frog in the brambles. The Lord hath put his whole armor upon me.

(Sign changes to “No Public Rejoicing.” CHRISTOPHER SMART regards it, continues.)

I bless the thirteenth of August, in which I had the grace to obey the voice of Christ in my conscience. I bless the thirteenth of August, in which I was willing to run all hazards for the sake of the name of the Lord. I bless the thirteenth of August, in which I was willing to be called a fool for the sake of Christ.

(Sign changes to “No Public Praying or Rejoicing.” CHRISTOPHER SMART regards it, continues.)

Man and beast appear, approach, present a ram, kneel with camels, offer a goat, bind a leopard to the altar, dedicate a tiger, appear with an ass, lead a mule forth with a lion, sanctify a bull, take the beavers of the brook—decently and with a chamois, bless the name, scoopeth the rock, archeth the sand—with a hare, parry the adversary, an ape with a fox, a lizard with an unicorn—the rhinoceros, put on his armor, the toad his virtue—the panther is invincible; the urchin provided to kick against the pricks!

(Sustained note breaks in again, loudly.)

ALL
O, YE TONGUES!

(CHRISTOPHER SMART crosses to mouth, reaches in and pulls out signs of his own, replaces the BUREAUCRAT's signs. They read "For I blessed God in St. James's Park till I routed all the company" and "For the officers of the peace are at variance with me, and the watchman smites me with his staff.")

(Lights down.)

(Lights up on new door in head of head, where door opens on a lake, fish are jumping, lake sounds. Water moves, fish move. Voices from behind head speak.)

FIRST VOICE
The Herring!
The Mackerel!
The Flounder!
The Shark!
The Gold Fish!

SECOND VOICE

Who is an eye trap!

FIRST VOICE

The Silver Fish!

The Torpedo!

The Whiting!

The Cod!

The Sturgeon!

The Folio!

SECOND VOICE

Who hath teeth like the teeth of a saw!

FIRST VOICE

The Ling!

SECOND VOICE

God keep English Sailors clear of French bribery!

FIRST VOICE

The Mermaid!

The Lobster!

SECOND VOICE

God be gracious to all the CAMPBELLS especially John!

(Lights Down.)

(Phone on desk rings. Lights up on BUREAUCRAT on the phone with index open.)

BUREAUCRAT

There are many words under Bull.
Bluecap is under Bull.
Hummingbird is under Bull.
Beetle is under Bull.
Frog is under Bull, which he has a delight to look at.
Bugle is under Bull.
Oxeye is under Bull.
Fire is under Bull.

(The person on the other end of the line has hung up. Lights down.)

(Lights up on CHRISTOPHER SMART's face.)

CHRISTOPHER SMART

For I will consider my cat, Jeoffry.

(Light moves to eye in giant head. The eye opens to reveal a cyclo-rama inside it that rolls through heartwarming cat scenes—i.e., Garfield, Felix, covers of *Cat Fancy*. Voices from behind head speak.)

FIRST VOICE

For my cat is shaped like a shovel and very green. For with his whiskers he can pick up small waffle crumbs.
For when he turns my upholstery into ribbons, he seems to be wearing a tri-corner hat.
For he is merciful and his spine demonstrates several advanced theories about shopping.
For he knocks over bottled water.
For his anger is accompanied by huge amounts of Gatorade.

For he is deft with a stain stick and can remove red wine blotches with salt seltzer water.
For he knows the Louvre like the back of his hand.
For Leonardo da Vinci once said that he could run ten miles in ten minutes, but he can do it faster.
For he is gracious around hamburgers.
For he does not spit.
For he can garden.
For he got his learner's permit.
For when he visited the Great Salt Lake, he rented a paddle boat and drove it at top speed.
For when he visited Babylon, he beat Hammurabi in pool.
For he majored in accounting.
For he invented the ATM on his lunch break.
For on his cigarette break he bumped into Nikolai Gogol and smeared grape jelly onto him.
For it smelled.
For it rained.
For his majesty in staring at a door.
For his relentless pursuit of a good bacon sandwich, for his belief in the roundness of balls.
For his eyes are like forks—let them always be swift in the ketchup.
For onion rings—he's completely nuts about onion rings.
For he's also completely nuts about sweetpotato fries.
For his enthusiasm about fried food in general rotates the earth.
For he is good on the balance beam—you should see him on the balance beam, he can really go.
For he speaks eloquently about Kant.
For he is handy about the house too—he can fix a broken toilet.
For he conserves water and lectures at Trinity College, Dublin.
For his fortuitousness in love.
And for his stylish banjo playing.

And for his contribution to anthropology.
For you can dump punch on him and he does not care.
For he always surrounds himself with static electricity.
For he is not a robot.
For he would never transport illegal fireworks across a state line without
a very good reason.
For his jumps are booms that echo in the bosoms of men.

(Lights down.)

(Lights up on CHRISTOPHER SMART.)

CHRISTOPHER SMART

I bless God for my Newcastle friends. Let Tobias bless charity with his
Dog, a friend in poverty. The poor gentleman is the first object of the Lord's
charity. He is the most pitied who hath lost the most. The Poorman's
nosegay is an introduction to a Prince.

The purse is for me. I have neither money nor human friends. My Angel
is always ready at a pinch to help me out and to keep me up.

Lord have mercy on the poor this hard weather. Lord have mercy upon
poor laborers this bitter frost. The sun is an improving angel.

This day I made over my inheritance to my mother in consideration of
her poverty. I have translated in the charity, which makes things better
and I shall be translated myself at the last. God send me a neighbor this
September.

(Sign changes to "Absolutely no praying without ceasing permitted."
CHRISTOPHER SMART regards it, continues with all the

language he has, creating new fragments, ecstatically continuing and continuing.)

(As CHRISTOPHER SMART speaks, other performers come out from both sides of set, blow up white balloons covered in the following text: “For I bless God in the rising generation, which is on my side”; “Let her rejoice with water wag tail, who is a neighbor, and loves to be looked at”; “Magnificat”; “Let Jona rejoice with the Wilk—Wilks, Wilkie, and Wilkinson bless the name of the lord Jesus”; “Life will follow as fast as it can”; “For all spirits are of fire and the air is a very benign one”; and “Many of our favorite phrases unfurling out of the mouth.” The balloons are distributed throughout the audience.)

CHRISTOPHER SMART

For I will consider my cat, Jeffry. I will rejoice in the remembrance of mercy. There is a perfumed fish I will offer Mycrus for a sweet savior to the Lord. I will magnify the Lord who multiplied the fish. I will magnify the Lord who multiplied the barley loaves. “For I will hiss saith the Lord” is God’s denunciation of death. Let Joanna, of the Lord’s line, rejoice with the Minnow, who is multiplied against the oppressor. For this is as much as to challenge, if you will let her go, I will engage you, as prodigious a creature as you are.

(CHRISTOPHER SMART and the music reach a crescendo at the same moment. CHRISTOPHER SMART reaches forward and crashes a cymbal. Lights down.)

(Lights up on jail cell in giant head. Small shadows of JEOFFRY and CHRISTOPHER SMART, who is horned. Voices speak from behind head.)

VOICE OF CHRISTOPHER SMART

I am not without authority in my jeopardy. The tall and stately are against me, but humiliation on humiliation is on my side. Silly fellow! Silly fellow is against me and belongeth neither to me nor my family. They have separated me and my bosom, whereas the right comes by setting us together. The Lord lift me up. The Lord enable me to shift. For the coffin is for me because I have nothing to do with it.

VOICE OF SAMUEL JOHNSON

I do not think he ought to be shut up. His infirmities were not noxious to society. He insisted on people praying with him; and I'd as lief pray with Kit Smart as anyone else. Another charge was that he did not love clean linen, and I have no passion for it.

(Lights down on shadows.)

(Lights down.)

(Lights up on CHRISTOPHER SMART. He looks at audience, lets audience look at him. He raises his sharpened pencil. They all raise their pencils. All at once, they pop the balloons.)

(Blackout.)

Nancy Kuhl

K U H L } 49

imagine her graceful slide
into the churning that descent
so slow not even a splash
and the sweep of chaos air
fierce and compelling relentless
the body thrust into the heavenly
white gush of falling water or lost
consciousness sometimes like this
woman with no name they wake
in the shallows to another earthly
face to his eager reach his grip
under arms to drag the same body out
imagine her disappointment a gasp
filling drenched lungs her horror
at the way things continue
to come apart slowly or all at once

from DICHTIONARY

A GERMAN-ENGLISH DICTIONARY OF FALSE FRIENDS,
TRUE COGNATES, AND OTHER COUSINS

IN 26 POEMS

Uljana Wolf

I

ibis

ibis ibis ibis

ibis

~

island

let's not mention geysers, or eyes
bulging out of the ground sur-
rounded by smoke-thin lashes. one
is watching a pony, the other's always
closed, an island, a dream. an ibis
doesn't dream of distant lands: her
other's always close. the hare on the
other is left empty-handed, he'll
never, that much was clear. then an
eagle flies up and takes care of the
rest.

P

pony

pregnant

probe

pregnant

a pregnant pause! we page her in the department store: in more a family than a friendly way, a mane up top like an icelandic horse (not s'posed to say pony), a tail in back (pure pony, that). she likes to hide out in the booths, 'specially glass ones: just checking things out. clothes make the sentence, sentences make do. alice please come to the main entrance. we'll pick you up.

T

tag

~ tier ~ toll

ton

since you've been gone, each day has
worn a little tag to show its rank so
no toes get trod on that should be
slipperd and shod. lest friday be a
tiff, and thursday a tiger dying of
thirst. later you'll have to pay for
these adventures. or at least tick them
off, one at a time, all those meters
and tons, tie them all up together,
setting the tone you're about to miss.

*Translated from the German by Susan
Bernofsky.*

THE TRAPPING SESSIONS: (FREE)

TC Tolbert

Somehow,
if I speak the same: (do I speak the same)
negative capability is just a word. (Word.)
I live in that compression. Language—
do something unusual
to languish me. Language me,
language, steal my voice.

~::~~

Let's just say I'm the
fish. Yes. I'm the fish begging
tricks for less air.
Compositional improv is not metaphor.
My voice changed and I
thought I was k(no)wingly.
Speak memory, speak. _____.
Memory: break voice.

~::~~

Smile (defer) smile, smile,
shimmy. Wink—wait. That's not *my*
line. My line slipped.

~::~~

A table covered
with t-shirts is a living
room. And who wouldn't
feel safe in that ray-
o-gram. Where we are only
what the light cannot
prove. (I live in that
compression.) And who wouldn't
language in whose voice.

~::~~

If there is not here
there's a line I crossed. Somewhere valence
got Prufrocked with the T.

~::~~

Tell me something porchlight
and give it earplugs. I swear to god
my clit's the size of your arm.

~::~~

You have forgotten that I do so little
with the skin I'm in. You make me a ladder
and now I want you to make me more.

IT IS A CITY YOU SEE THROUGH WATER

Ken Chen

Stranger. SEA-TAC 5:58 PM SAT

When I woke up
you served on a silver tray—an omelet and condom. All night
we had looked at each other and thought Who are you? 9:45 AM SUN

The wet lamplight tangles into wire. It will
stitch your eyes closed. YOUR APARTMENT WINDOW 6:01 PM SUN

shifted 9:30 PM FRI

light. FLYING 9:06 PM SUN

woke up, 9:45 AM SUN

as an I 2:24 PM SAT

a small 5:31 PM SUN

Seattle—it seems to have almost nothing 5:57 PM SUN
The bus hinges when it turns, as an *I* becomes a letter *L*, as in “We are lodged
within the bus’s folds.” I put my head on your shoulder and think of when
you called two weeks ago and said, *I am only calling to tell you we are not going out. That*
is all I have to say and goodbye. SANDPOINT BUS 2:24 PM SAT

to do with you. 5:57 PM SUN

Art and no one else at the abandoned Naval park.

This week’s *Stranger*

plastered red on the asphalt, soaked with the
blood from your scraped knee. SEA-TAC 5:56 PM SUN

(I am sitting in the shuttle. My hands smell like 10:30 PM SUN

no idea why.” YOUR APARTMENT 5:26 PM SUN

The heart TAXI WINDOW 5:31 PM SUN

In 9:39 PM FRI

wet 6:01 PM SUN

flight. 9:30 PM FRI

In 9:39 PM FRI

coldly TAXI TO SEA-TAC 5:30 PM SUN

coldly 5:30 PM SUN

Berkeley

and Seattle STANDING IN OAK CAR LOT 9:40 PM FRI

a couple shivering with 10:27 PM SUN

eyes closed. 6:01 PM SUN

is a city you see through water. 5:31 PM SUN

A grandmother and her daughter stop
at North Oakland. At Hoyt, another boy to his I-Pod leashed.
It is not sentimental to return home. I see a couple shivering with their
dog. SHUTTLE FROM OAK 10:27 PM SUN

My feet step out into the street EXITING SHUTTLE 10:56 PM SUN

My feet step out into the street 10:56 PM SUN

And the stewardess says my baggage may have shifted in flight. 9:30 PM FRI

The 6:01 PM SAT

dog. 10:27 PM SUN

light. FLYING 9:06 PM SUN

stitch YOUR APARTMENT WINDOW 6.02 PM SAT
blood, SEA-TAC 5:56 PM SAT

going out, BUS 2:30 PM SAT

! 5:23 PM SUN

We played *Mario Kart* and you wanted to win.
 You did win but only by tickling me. YOUR LIVING ROOM
3 PM SAT

This place FLYING 9.06 PM SUN
 This place you happen to live with, I realize this city
 is not made of rain. It's made of 9.06 PM SUN

is not sentimental 10.27 PM SUN

like you.) 10.30 PM SUN

away from 2.24 PM SAT

I see your apartment window coldly lit
 like a small rectangular
 moon TAXI TO SEA-TAC 5.30 PM SUN

The cab!

You sat at the mattress edge and said, *You are*
leaving and I have no idea why. YOUR BEDROOM 5:23 PM SUN

And you did win YOUR LIVING ROOM 3 PM SAT
put my head on your shoulder and think 2:24 PM SAT
step out into the street 10:56 PM SUN
stop 10:27 PM SUN

And why did I think that we could not understand? 5:24 PM SUN

Small rectangular TAXI TO SEA-TAC 5:30 PM SUN
halted 5:30 PM SUN

heart 5:24 PM SUN

From above FLYING 9:04 PM SUN
Berkeley and STANDING IN OAK CAR LOT 9:40 PM FRI

halted a little in orbit. TAXI TO SEA-TAC 5:30 PM SUN
this FLYING 9:05 PM SUN

those BUS 2:24 PM SAT
shivering OAK CAR LOT 9:42 PM SUN
hinges BUS 2:24 PM SAT

leashed SHUTTLE FROM OAK 10:27 PM SUN

“A S T O R M O F
C O M M A S W A S
C O M I N G”

(R E N É C H A R)

Cal Bedient

Heraclitus

on fire with Heraclitus

/is lost in the rain again,

/// streamy slashes, the way an oracle speaks.

During the season of commas,

the minnows

do not contradict the current,

their standstillity

is a trick,

see,

they flick—

I love their spongy motility,

their slipperiness in the hands of the critique.

It's positively SPITTING commas,

it's just MARVELOUSLY commatic—

all the commas crossing the water like horses
(without a crossing
is no Sierra).

Tell me
what is happening, where are you going, your pores so open?

Alas, bad things happen to commas, such as:
 they're near-sighted, they pant,
they drag a limp leg,
 their crotch hangs awry,
their name means "piece cut off."

With what would commas commune?
they have no idea,
 they are tired,
this is horrible.

I have attended to their technical reflections,
and tasted their hurrying-to-the-dumb-place tears.

RAYS OF THE TERRITORY

1

The fruit grown by my sister rain was two blue
leaves short of satisfaction the air was snatch

2

or slip like a knight skating back
across the board balancing blue

3

berries on a table knife and the sky
was a '48 Chevy visor lowered against the sun.

4

Life was a skip rose nobody jumps in. So I ate
them things, heart, all those things

5

I had thought to call my little ones.

6

I was already in addition very dangerous
nervous languaged irregular with a mother.

7

For who can be a hero
if he snows on his own breast
like the Russian tongue, until,
finding the loneliest things,
he showers lots of *likes* on them,

8

light, feathery *likes*,
so as not to hurt them,

9

little satiny ribbons of cold?

10

Anyway, I knew I could out
stray any house organization
like yellowtails swishing around

11

swishing around in a coral reef,
matches craving more and more summer.

12

A brute—I can show you *that*
sort of hero, the one who sings *my*
people are the cicadas in Arcadia you dare not touch
the electricity of our tree,

13

his sensibility a fender on which a buck
hangs its extinguished chandelier. Listen, Joan,

14

ignore the smell of unfresh clothing in
John's letters, the fat odor of a hunter's coat

15

hanging over the back of your chair
as you read them. You know he likes

16

your different smell, your *before the wars* false acacia smell
is how he would put it if he weren't

17

dressing the deer, tearing its envelope
to get at the meat. Even in
razoring cold

18

the hero is in love with day,
vicious day, our long fanatic.

[ERASED BY WAVES]

Craig Santos Perez

'fire'
as in our house
is on fire—
'land'
as in landfill, land-
fallen—'ocean'
as in the ocean is
alive inside of
'we'
as in we are broken
to any 'shore'
as in after and before
each scar
becomes a promise—
'skin'
as in our skin and the light
are identical
'tears'
as in our names
repeatedly erased
by 'waves'—

ACROSS

Rae Armantrout

1

Wood
under an oval lake
of glass

across which
this morning
parallel wakes
appear,

gleaming bits
of skin, akin
to happiness?

2

Of course, “across”
is metaphorical.

But light is violent and weightless.

Light is the wail of atoms
pressed to touch.

It is reluctance

raised
to absolute velocity

GARDEN

"Best wishes,"
you conclude,

and here they are—

a line-up of characters:

the loose-lipped blue hibiscus,

the flashy columbine
like a shooting star
in reverse,

the composite, scarlet verbena

made to stand
against a wall.

~::~~

"That's nice,"
but it's the liminal,

the area between
sleep and waking up,

the border
we think we remember

between existing
and not

that we still want.

INTERVIEW WITH RAE ARMANTROUT

Rae Armantrout was born in Vallejo, California, in 1947. She is the author of eleven books of poetry, including *Versed* (2009), which received the 2010 Pulitzer Prize and the 2009 National Book Critics Circle Award and was a finalist for the 2009 National Book Award. Her other poetry collections include *Next Life* (2007), selected as the *New York Times* “Notable Book” in 2007; as well as *Up to Speed* (2004) and *Veil: New and Selected Poems* (2001), both finalists for the PEN Center USA Award. She has also published a collection of interviews and essays, *Collected Prose* (2007). Armantrout’s other honors include a fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation and two Fund for Poetry awards. She is a professor of Writing and Literature at UC San Diego, where she has taught for more than two decades. This interview was conducted by Robert N. Casper in New York City on March 13, 2009.



Can you talk about the importance of voice in your poems?

There are so many voices in the air. Sometimes they become the voices in my head—voices from the media, or a tone of voice from my mother. All of those voices go into who we are, and are distinguishable from us too. My beginning point is to separate myself from them, or throw them off by putting brackets around them. There wasn’t much conscious use of other voices in my first book, *Extremities*. However, the first poem in my second book, *The Invention of Hunger*, was taken partly from a *Scientific American* article about termites and partly from some material about S&M

bondage. And certainly my use of outside voices continues: for instance, here is my poem "Integer," from *Versed*:

1

One what?
One grasp?
No hands.
No collection
of stars. Something dark
pervades it.

2

Metaphor
is ritual sacrifice.

It kills the look-alike.

No,
metaphor is homeopathy.

A healthy cell
exhibits contact inhibition.

3

These temporary credits
will no longer be reflected
in your next billing period.

“Dark” meaning
not reflecting,
not amenable
to suggestion.

The third section came directly from my phone bill. While I was working on the poem, my husband Chuck read that aloud to me and said, “What does this mean?” and I thought, That goes in. We didn’t know what temporary credits were, but it sounded sort of ominous—temporary credit now being revoked.

It’s interesting to note how that found section is embedded in the poem, and how the poem responds to it, as it is echoing and questioning its terms.

The fourth section responds to the word “reflected” in the third section, but it also responds to the word “dark” in the first section. That pulls the three sections together, at least in my mind, and then goes to “not amenable to suggestion”—as if reflection is a kind of suggestion. It also connects back to the second part and portrays metaphor as a kind of reflection.

Can you talk more about the use of question-and-response as a rhetorical device in your poems?

A good example of that might be the last two sections of “A Resemblance,” in *Versed*:

Look alike.

“Are you happy now?”

~::~~

Would I like
a vicarious happiness?

Yes!

Though I suspect
yours of being defective,

forced

I ask two questions, then give an answer. “Look alike” actually responds to some of the comparisons I’ve made before—it refers to the similes poetry is supposed to deal in. And then, “Are you happy now?”—okay, so I’ve made some similes, are you happy now? That’s the kind of voice you hear in a relationship. . . .

Or one you might hear on television—it’s a stock phrase.

Right—it’s also something that might occur in dialogue. When I use such phrases, I call it “faux collage”—sometimes they are “real” found language, and sometimes they only seem to be real. Putting “Are you happy now?” in quotes makes it look like the former, but it isn’t, really . . . I didn’t see it somewhere or hear it on television. Sometimes I do pick out phrases I see or hear on television, but sometimes I just make them up because they’re already in my head.

By contrast, the next question, “Would I like / a vicarious happiness,” seems wholly original.

And I answer it with “yes” and an exclamation point. What follows

undercuts that “yes” a bit—it’s as if I’m saying I’d like to share your happiness in a vicarious way, although I’m also suspicious that you’re faking your happiness. Which I’ll never know.

I’m happy you brought that up: I admire the ways your poems use the exclamatory, as in the final section of “A Resemblance.” Which made me all the more surprised by the lack of a period at the end of the poem.

Sometimes I just want to give the sense that the thought process isn’t quite finished, so I won’t put a period at the end of the last word of the poem. And other times, I want the reader to get the sense that they should keep thinking, because this might go on.

I often begin with a sense of puzzlement about something—with a real question, perhaps unformed in my own mind. There might not be an answer to it, so you work through and you still end unresolved—I find this aesthetically interesting, because then you have a kind of dynamics and complexity going on. Forces pulling away from and pushing against each other.

I wonder how the fluid interplay of private and public language in your poems relates to their speaker?

I’m fascinated by, and concerned with, what the self is—what a single thing is, what defines oneself or a thing. I think that the edges blur . . . I’m not saying we don’t have selves, but I’ve always been interested in the tension between the singular and the multiple. I was just reading *Being And Event* by Alain Badiou, in which he talks about the initial act of consciousness, which he calls “Count as One.” At some point in our early development, in the midst of the buzzing, blooming, confusing world of sensory phenomenon around us, we define the object—what is the chair? Is it part of the table or not part of the table? Yesterday I went to

see the Pierre Bonnard show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and in many of his pieces one color spills over from an object where it apparently belongs onto an object or a person on which it apparently doesn't belong. I'm interested in pointing out those edges and those blurs, whether they're personal or have to do with objecthood.

I would like to talk about "Dark Matter," the second section of Versed. Did working with a thematic focus—i.e., addressing your fight with cancer—affect your writing process?

My method didn't really change. It's just that that part is more thematically coherent because I kept thinking about the same thing over and over . . . it was not going leave my mind, at least not for awhile. It's starting to recede a bit now, so I'm moving on to other subjects—I hope not prematurely—but of course that was going to be uppermost in my mind for the first year and a half or so, right? There was a de facto coherence, and then after awhile I began to see how it was coming together with a certain tone. Some poems at the end of the first section deal directly with my illness, so it's not an absolute distinction. For instance, the poem "Owned" is based on notes I took in the hospital, even in the ICU. It's amazing to me that I couldn't read, but I was still scribbling things. By contrast, I wrote the poem "Birth Order" after I got home, when I was just thinking about cancer. "On Your Way" deals with death, and it's near the end of the *Versed* section—it sort of shifts there. The poems in the second section are written in the moment of a sort of afterlife—after surgery, and after the shock I went through, because I had no idea I had cancer. In fact, I was in New York three weeks before I was diagnosed, walking around giving readings, and I was fine. It was very sudden, and I was completely unprepared—I wasn't even that upset, because I was too shocked. Then I went into surgery, and came home with a slim prospect of recovery. I thought, Okay, now I am a dying person. "Dark Matter" was written from that point of view—not exactly deliberately, but that's how it happened. There were a few poems

that I moved . . . “Heaven” is one, oddly, and “Guess” is one that I wrote after I came home. I can’t remember why I moved “Heaven,” because it seems like it could have been in “Dark Matter” now. Sometimes we don’t understand these things. The first section in *Versed* is a bit more manic, and there are a lot of playful notes in poems like “Pleasure” or “Name Calling” that refer to sex and even romance. There was that kind of liveliness and quirkiness in “Versed,” and “Dark Matter” grew more somber. In the end, I was not always writing to the topic of disease, but striking a more austere tone that I would want to return to.

In a previous interview, you seemed to resist being called a lyric poet. What does the term lyric mean to you, and how might it relate to your poems?

I recently wrote an essay on my relationship to the lyric, for the eighth installment of *The Grand Piano* project—a kind of collective autobiography I’m involved in. I’m never sure exactly what people mean by lyric poetry—they seem to mean a relatively short, self-contained poem, as opposed to a book-length work. And it’s not a prose poem. Do they also mean a poem that foregrounds or emphasizes sound? Maybe . . . but Pound did that in the “Cantos,” and the “Cantos” is a book-length quasi-narrative poem, so I don’t know if you’d call it a lyric. Or is the lyric something that tries to stop time or freeze a moment in an epiphanic way? My poems try to sort of imagine a complicated present that doesn’t really lead to an epiphany per se. But still, my poetry might relate to the lyric in its attempt to bring together a version of the present . . . I read with Cole Swenson last night, and it struck me that her work is always about the historical in some sense, while mine is always about the present.

How do you see scientific and religious language fitting into your present? Certainly both play a role in your poems.

I'm attracted to both scientific and religious explanations without necessarily believing in either. Of course, I come closer to believing in the former—I believe its method is closer to a process of truth. Still, that doesn't mean that at any point a particular scientific paradigm is true. I like the way both ventures of thought are trying to reach to ultimate causes. But at the same time, I tend to want to question them, and to put them in conjunction, perhaps because I was raised in a fundamentalist religion. I probably turned to science at first as a kind of prophylactic against religion. I've already seen science's idea of the universe's change, and it's changing fairly rapidly now—I mean, they just came up with the idea of dark energy, and discovered the universe is expanding at a faster rate instead of slowing down. So, the scientific attempt to reach truth is obviously provisional.

Along the same lines, do you see poetry as a process of truth?

Well, sometimes when I read a poem and I enjoy it, I do get the sense of "That's true." I think we're always going for truth—you can read a statement in one poem and have a "That's true" response, and later read a poem that says almost the exact opposite, which in context will also give you that truth. Lisa Robertson and I read together recently, and we discovered that we both have a poem about heaven. Mine's called "Heaven" and in verse, while hers is called "Essay on Heaven"—and they actually said the opposite thing! For instance, the second part of my poem states, "Heaven is symmetric with respect to rotation," while hers had something do with asymmetry. It was odd that we both had this concept, and it seemed like either one worked in context. Then you realize, there really is no firm meaning there.

Getting back to an earlier topic, I think the phrase "Symmetrical with respect to rotation" came from one of these layperson books about science. We think of symmetry in relation to beauty and aesthetics, and as

a grand concept, but that line was such a dry description of it—reductive yet accurate. There's such a jarring clash of tones in the poem—it's an example of how I connect religion and science.

In your essay "Cheshire Poetics," you state, "I think of my poetry as inherently political (though it is not a poetry of opinion)." Can you elaborate on that statement?

Well, I'll see if I can get this quote right: I think it was Yeats who said, "Of our argument with others, we make rhetoric; of our arguments with ourselves, we make poetry." I guess a poem of opinion would be essentially an argument with others, trying to persuade others. When you attempt to do so, you make as consistent an argument as you can. I'm more interested in the way we argue with ourselves and the potential dissonances that we find around us.

Through those dissonances, and your use of public language, your work has a clear political engagement. Yet its unwillingness to define a line of argument frustrates a straightforward political reading.

Maybe the poem "Fade" is an example of that kind of thing:

The new reality
is a pastiche
of monologues.

Fighter pilots
in the Gulf

worry out loud
about their performance.

But how do we
come into it?

“Zombie Strippers!”

living pay-off
to pay-off,

numbed out,

avaricious

~::~~

So much happiness
is caged
in language,

ready
to burst out
anytime

and fade

The poem starts out with a political commentary on “new reality,” or reality television. There actually was a PBS version of a reality TV show about an aircraft carrier, in which fighter pilots talk off-the-cuff, off-guard. And they say, “Am I dropping enough bombs?” and “I don’t get to drop my bombs”—that sort of thing. Which I thought was so odd I had to put it in a poem. The term “zombie strippers” comes from a sort of B movie called *Zombie Strippers* that I happened to see an ad for at that same time. In the second part of the poem, I’m really talking about poetry and myself as a

poet, and that's a different subject. I like the way "language" and "caged" echo each other, and then are "ready / to burst out / anytime // and fade" like a jet taking off or a bomb exploding, producing a sort of release.

I'm happy you brought that poem up—I think it's a good example of the interplay between the abstract and the concrete in your work. How do you think both types of language operate in your poems, and how do you decide to turn from one to the other?

This is something I often have to discuss with my students. Recently I taught a graduate workshop, but with art students, so there was a really high level of abstraction. Somebody actually put the phrase "Derridian paradigm" in a poem, and "heteronormativity"—that's a mouthful! So we had to have the abstraction discussion. Basically I told them you don't want to rely a lot (or entirely) on abstract language, unless you're a philosopher—philosophers create their own definitions, logic, and contexts for their abstractions. And abstraction doesn't work unless it has a context, but the poem can try to provide a context for the abstraction by embedding it in situations or images or something concrete. In my poems there is always a tension between the abstract and the concrete, but I hope there's also a relation, and so it's a productive tension.

One can see the poem title as concrete, as well as metaphoric. The first stanza is entirely abstract, but then you switch to a moment that is, if not overly descriptive, at least more concrete.

It provides an example.

It also announces the poem's political framework, which gets played out via your signature juxtaposition of ideas and notions and tones. Also, the poem uses more abstract language than you might think upon first read—it seems to concretize its abstractions.

Yeah, I think that's true.

And a word like “caged” (like “fade”) plays it both ways, as in the condition and the actual cage.

And the stripper might be in a cage.

Exactly.

Especially since she's a zombie.

One would hope! The poem “Money Shot” ends with the quote “why don't you just say what you mean? Why don't I?” Could you talk about the balance in your poems between revelation and resistance?

Well, actually that section of “Money Shot” is based on a dream—it's not uncommon for me to include dreams in my poems. Dreams are always to some extent coded—it's as if you're censoring yourself in your dream, at least as Freud would have it. And why are they coded? You could ask the same question about poems, really—why are they disguised? There must be a reason. I'm not sure I know it—it's just how the mind works. The last line is actually a play on a voice from the dream . . . I'm on a crowded ship, and I've been served the wrong breakfast—this small mound of soggy dough is not what I ordered. I complain, and the waiter replies, “Why don't you just say what you mean?” When I woke up and began to write out the poem, I thought the “I” in the poem is equivalent to the dream. And I wondered, Why *isn't* the dream saying what it means, and what *does* it mean?

UNCUT

Kevin Simmonds

When the clean-shaven one
with the black Porsche asked me
not to clean it
I understood the poetry
in his appetite,
whatever would gather until Saturday night,
the yellow and white of it, how
he'd pull back the skin
one stanza at a time.
I'd look away from his trembling fingers,
his foraging tongue,
and swallow.

SELF DIALOGUE WATCHING RICHARD PRYOR LIVE ON THE SUNSET STRIP

Marcus Wicker

What of stepping outside the door on fire?
What of running down a faceless road
Let alone a busy strip, enflamed? Got-damn!
There must be 10,000 selves in an epidermis. Imagine
Yours. Imagine the skin peeling-flame of each self-
Inflicted arson. Imagine the freedom to say God
Damn! To consider what that feels like. To speak
A wild geyser spraying from a busted hydrant.
You watch Richard Pryor in a loud fire engine
Red suit—all flashing lights, sirens: 10,000 selves
Visible to the world, & consider what that feels like.
To think, you may or may not be God damned.
To know, at least, your dick is intact.

LOVE LETTER TO JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

When I think of you
it is always of a small, locked room.
A principal's dark, full lips
pressed together in a smirk. A glare
from his fat, gold herringbone chain
burning tears in my eyes, my face
red as yours in direct sunlight. And
even as my voice shut down
that day, I knew ditching
to buy *NSYNC's cd
was worth more than
Prescriptive Speech class.
What I heard: four voices
harmonized in a plastic bottle.
Your falsetto, blowing the top off.
Michael Jackson
with no abusive, boxer father
or snatched childhood.
Sam Cooke
sans German Shepherds
stalking through his songs.
I've been watching James Brown
and Jackie Wilson make
pelvic fixation public domain
since I was old enough
to work a remote. And I have yet
to allude starched lines. How did you
learn to dance your way out of boxes?

Or did you
find it easy as breathing, like whistling
the national anthem?
Do you remember the Super Bowl?
How you tore Janet Jackson's breast
from her top?
I love you that way.
Her earth brown bounty of flesh—
large, black nipple
pierced, wind chapped, hardened.
And you saying, Go ahead. Look.

SCENE AFTER SCENE

Mary Jo Bang

She had taken off. Had plunged,
fresh air, the kiss at the open window.
That awful smoke rising. That pocket-knife
hush. A warning crossing every moment.
Acts of tramp and trudge.
Wrapped lawns in muslins. Absurd.

I love pictures. Scene after scene
shooting to a brain. Messages on waves.
But suddenly, in the middle of day, an arrow
like a knife through a perpetual instant.
The only gift was instinct.
A cat's plodding. A glove of nothing.

White dawn. This idiocy. Throw of the dice
but not this red, upright, jar.
This violent explosion,
a dove-grey shop like a cloud, falling upon faces.
Whose? Nobody. A standstill.
The throb of a pulse.

A curious pattern. Some horror-world
blocking the pavement but for the cars
on both sides. The symbol
of a grass-grown path hurrying along.
At the top, copies of wheels whispering.
A crowd of thighs without occupation.

High up the sound of white smoke for a moment.
Awestricken, perfectly still,
a grasshopper's rasped spine transfixed,
shut eyes, alive, but robbed of suspense.
The outlines gone, the night is full of daylight.
Midnight boundaries lost.

Animals stretched over the zoo.
The cricket voice of the suffering. Stone men,
women, spread out on the steps of society.
The traffic. The swish
of exquisite moments, while by her,
trying to calm, a weapon sliced the surface,

ripped the man and woman confessing to some
sudden revelation, an illumination.
Blood in veins had to be amazing.
The sponge of feeling. Pink evening.
A granite wall. Falling.

OPENED AND SHUT

She had prepared a looking-glass: hair, dress, thought,
sofa in the glow of dogs barking.

Beautifully close up. And once, flames
eating the edge of the sofa.

Her eyelashes blurred. Chin, nose, forehead, some lips.
The cheek. The glass looking first at one thing,
then another: nose, eyes, evening.

She sat looking at the map of her hands.
The window, the clock, her pulse.

The body was busy thinking, conjuring
the museum of a moment: emotion, scenes, people,
bags of treasures. Heaps of theories.

Theories to explain feeling the here and the back of the hand.
A theory allowed one thing after another.
First, dinner, then morning.

Her hand was the world.
To get to it she had to look at herself.

To get at the truth one would have to disregard
anything false. Yet the truth was intangible—

One eye on the horizon: a long indeterminable,
mere straightness, a few plants.
That indescribable purple.

Doors being opened. Visual impressions—
as if the eye were the brain, the body entering the house.

A HINT OF HER DEATH & I DREAM OF LOSING TEETH

Miranda Field

Abandoned buildings
these twenty crenellations of childishness
divided among the four quadrants of my mouth.
You don't need to google every symbol.
The finishing touch on something made
in an old-fashioned kitchen, baby tooth-marks
crimp the edges of my heart. My heart murmurs around the clock
in response to these small motions of self-ingestion—
like an ear being nibbled. Tearing tissue
I almost remember the pain of stalagmites and stalactites forming
(but it persists only as an itch) from my mother's milk—
magical catalyst oozing from supernumary ducts
over my soft palate, my hard palate also.
Whenever I speak now, I repeat in some way that feeling.
Whenever I swallowed my mother was digesting & deconstructing
for me.
Whatever internal scaffold I needed these particles assembled.
I'm dreaming through slits in some bone mass that has to do with this.
How I'm not quite ready to grow myself without roots.
I'm not ready to Mouli my own food—
only motherless babies must Mouli their own food.
Suddenly it's impossible not to notice a preponderance of *m*'s in all
my murmurings,
in everything emerging from this dream. *Mama*—
quaquaversal, transmigratory—*ma, me, mo* sprout in all human mouths.

This crumbling I feel when they threaten to take my mother away is
something completely real.
There aren't any artificial pearls
at the bottom of the sea.

I HAD THE CRAZIEST DREAM

Major Jackson

Never on Sunday she said and brandished
an oval locket of hair from each
of her lovers. I looked over my shoulders.
We sat munching on puffs of dried hydrangea
that no surprise tasted of cotton candy.
Far off on the sea, on a floating bench,
my mother excitedly talked up the president.
I questioned his killing clothes, and knew it all perishable
at any moment. The pictures were hanging themselves
up, proving they could hammer in the morning.

How You Love

Like the injured laid down at the scene of an accident
before cars collide, like cloud striations over
Fairyland Loop, like a kid's carnival balloon
diminishing and lost to the great blue,
like bright jewels scattered in some secret cave, like two
scissor blades breaking apart, like after-party guacamole
with drips of salsa, like diamonds of light rotating over
an empty dance-floor, like priests at night staring
in store windows at half-nude mannequins,
like dark earwax, like unscented candles, like Janus.

GREEN RIVER DIRGE

Greg Koehler

I said Here's a handy new tool
with which one might
hold her scratch, all her sugar, sugar, tight to her ass
I said. I said And however elegant it may be, it's still
a hidden clip, a tender jaw. A sweet bite. Here I said,

I said please hold this cabbage while I stuff my jock.
I said please I said. And then What's done is done?

I said Because we are ball-deep in the currents. See,
and Then what when there's a ward with your name
on it and I'll never know how to get around in it
and Are you capable of bearing the weight of the sea

when you see your eyes in a newborn head I said.
And Is that then what done is done is? Yes she said.

But I am a racehorse I said, and I will piss like one.
So I said You will never be strapped for cash, 'long
as you fasten this to your beating chest. It is a fine
phylactery I said to ward off all snowflakes, poverty,

and accidental purity. I said Hold them fast, precious
clasp. Even in death, preserve these virgin bills I said.

FRIO RIVER DIRGE

I have built a box and filled
it with bones. Of the bones
of trees have I built this box.

And with the bones of deer

have I filled this box. And an
antler is a bone, crowning the
skull, showing bone to wind.

And in this box I have filled

with bones, therefore, there
also are there antlers. How
it clatters, this box I've built.

I rattle the box to call a wind.

YOU ARE MY CAPTAIN

Tyler Meier

The blue tarps on the roofs after the storm
as if to confuse the sky back into itself,
as if the heavens did not dignify us
with the meant leering of pinion light,
with the cool aplomb of birds.
Here, we abandon the seasons
like all hope, like an affliction
of position—how the rift and mend
makes intimate: salt-dipped language
of pearlclang, such sweetness trending
the miscellany. Pollen like a thousand
Poseidons surfacing on the windshield
all spring, the buried wagon wheel
in the neighbor's yard as a lost helm,
as if we could tack sky, o leeward,
o starboard, o unsteered dayspawl,
wayward in the come about, suddenly
navigable. A voice like a heron
flew out a mouth, cursing the nearness—
a unit of measurement, as if the distance
between an elegy and lullaby
is a voice like a heron that flew out a mouth,
so too a pilot light and bonfire, so too the heart
and a basic pack animal of poor breeding.
I have neighbor-proof.
In the darkness, we go outside and act like tarps.

WHAT'S AMERICAN ABOUT AMERICAN POETRY?

The Poetry Society of America (in collaboration with Robert Pinsky, Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress, and the New School Writing Program) presented the festival “What’s American About American Poetry” in November 1999. In preparation, the PSA sent out a survey with questions about the state of American poetry to poets across the country, who represented a diverse range of genres, cultures, and aesthetics. Ten years later, the PSA sent out a version of those questions to a new group of poets. I have selected a representative group of the latter; the first responses and other new responses to the survey can be found at the PSA’s website, www.poetrysociety.org.

—Robert N. Casper



K. SILEM MOHAMMAD

In what ways might you consider yourself an American poet?

First, by recognizing the validity of the designation and accepting it. By acknowledging that I have no choice in the matter, even if I were to go ex-pat like Pound or Stein (that didn’t keep them from being American poets anyway). Second, by admitting that in many ways I’m at home in the role. The romance that attends all its hubris and swagger energizes me at the same time that it raises my critical alarms. Third, to get down to specifics, to the extent that my poetry is “about” anything, it’s often about being American, about what being American entails. This includes how we see ourselves, how we see others, how others see us, how we see others seeing us, and so on. I’m aware that writing as an American poet, I present

a certain image to other Americans and to the rest of the world. One way of handling that awareness would be to enter “best behavior” mode, to attempt to counter my Americanness by showing how enlightened and sensitive I am, how I’ve transcended all the bad consciousness of empire, traded it in for progressive enlightenment. But I haven’t, as much as I’d like to have. Like most Americans, I’m addicted to the privilege that living here confers on me. I’m not even close to giving it up. I try to be honest about that by allowing my poetry to reflect as accurately as possible the cynicism, optimism, confused terror, decadence, infantilism, bravado, nausea, and euphoria that are part of so many Americans’ experience.

Do you believe there is anything specifically American about American poetry past and present? Is there American poetry in the sense that there is said to be American painting or American film?

Certainly. American poetry is as distinctively American as any other art form you can name. One thing this means is that, like American film, it’s both profoundly innovative and resolutely superficial. The great American poems, like the great American movies, are ones that ring with a confident hollowness, with the windy echo of borrowed rhetoric, at the same time that they change the meaning of that rhetoric for everyone else forever. American poetry is built on the destruction and re-imagining of traditions, and as such, it’s as violent and heroic as American militarism. It has the same relation to technology, to social upheaval, to entrepreneurial economics, to marketing. It’s like a big crass billboard in front of a field of wheat—beautiful and tasteless in that way. It replaces the landscape with an infomercial about the landscape, replaces the motherly love with the artwork on a box of disposable diapers. When it’s most brilliant and successful, it does this like a martyr going to the stake—a martyr who thinks she’ll be rescued at the last second by commandos in a helicopter.

What role do historical and geographical factors play in American poetry and in your work specifically? What other aspects of your life (for instance: gender, sexual preference, class, ethnicity, religious beliefs) relate to your sense of being a poet in America?

I grew up in California's Central Valley, the half-Arab illegitimate child of a single welfare mother who was also the town cat lady, in a household with no car, telephone, or television. My mother dressed me funny, and I didn't know how to act in public. I dropped out of high school and never did get a driver's license. With all that going against me, I still managed, by the time I was in my twenties, to enter the mainstream of American culture: I made lots of friends, went to college, secured an academic career, etc. So my point is not that my experience was special or anomalous, but that in America, specialness and anomaly are in many ways the norm, and that almost anyone or anything can be assimilated into the dominant culture. This is the power and the horror of the American condition: the Horatio Alger myth as both dream and nightmare. The contemporary poetry that most "speaks" to me—say, the abrasive social texts of Bruce Andrews, or the Google sculpture of Katie Degentesh—captures this manic derangement of mass ethics and aesthetics.

Is there something formally distinctive about American poetry?

In addition to what I've already said, the only thing I can think to do is repeat the old commonplace about breaking form, one of the most familiar versions of which is Ezra Pound's line in "Canto LXXXI:" "to break the pentameter, that was the first heave." American poetry—at least the American poetry I feel most connected to—tends to observe form in the breach. Which is not the same as abandoning form, of course, if that were even possible. The kind of breach I value is a deliberate, considered, and thus very formal breach. To quote Emily Dickinson slightly out of context, "Ruin is formal." I think a lot of American poetry is about ruin (moral,

economic, national, global), and when it's most successful, it captures the formal qualities of that ruin.

What significance does popular culture possess in your sense of American poetry?

Immense significance. Popular culture is part of life, and increasingly it's the part of life that shapes our sensibilities at a deep level, like it or not. A poetics that is heavily invested in pretending that Taylor Swift, Glenn Beck, and *Final Fantasy XIII* don't exist is blinkered and inadequate.

When you consider your own "tradition," do you think of American poets, non-American poets? Which historic poets do you consider most responsible for generating distinctly American poetics?

I think both of American poets (Stein, Zukofsky, O'Hara, Coolidge, Hejinian, Kevin Davies, Anne Boyer, etc.) and non-American poets (Catullus, Reverdy, Khlebnikov, Schwitters, Queneau, Eiríkur Örn Norðdahl, etc.). I don't find it very helpful, however, to phrase the question in terms of which "historic poets" are "most responsible for generating distinctly American poetics." I think there are a lot of "distinctly American poetics" out there, and some of them are more interesting to me than others. I'm more invested in a distinctly *exciting* poetics, and usually what I consider exciting is linguistic and imaginative bravery, willingness to rupture past conceptions of what counts as legitimate practice. So for me the rise of the sonnet in Italy, English Renaissance experiments in quantitative versification, Dada, the New York School, Language poetry, and so forth are all part of what I think of as an exciting tradition or chain of traditions. I'm aware that excitement is a problematic criterion—it's part of what Wordsworth, for instance, considered responsible for the atrophy of meaningful poetic sensibility, and it's perhaps the chief instrument of corporate seduction and distraction via mass media—but it's what we're

wired as humans to respond to. And of course there are different kinds of excitement: physical, intellectual, metaphysical. I'm thinking of excitement in distinction to its opposite: stultification, the inducement of lethargy, especially as this effect is achieved through a contrived sense of reverence or allegiance to Tradition with a capital T.

What are your predictions for American poetry in the next century?

It will thrill and disappoint us, in that order and/or its reverse.

JULIE CARR

In what ways do you consider yourself an American poet? Do you believe there is anything specifically American about American poetry past and present? Is there American poetry in the sense that there is said to be American painting or American film?

A real answer to this question must start with some other nation's poetry. One should have a deep knowledge of at least one other culture, in order to argue for the specificity of things American.

What many of us have, including myself, is knowledge of British poetry before 1900. But the British is not quite an "other culture," since the American reaction to the British so sharply defines us, or *defined* us in centuries prior to this one. But that is an old story, and I'd like to tell a slightly newer story in thinking about American poems.

In 1962 at the Judson Memorial Church in Manhattan several dancers and choreographers came together to study composition under Robert Dunn, who had himself studied with John Cage. The dances these people created in the following years included Yvonne Rainer's "Trio A," and

Trisha Brown's "Group Primary Accumulation," pieces necessary, in my view, to any real understanding of American dance (or art in general). The collective called "The Grand Union" developed out of this moment, as did Contact Improvisation, initiated by Steve Paxton's explorations with gravity, momentum, and weight. What these dancers, dances, and explorations shared was an interest in egalitarian structures, in accumulative (rather than narrative or classical) scores, in taking improvisation as an art, rather than a means to an end, in releasing the body from rigid technical requirements (such as those demanded by Graham Technique or Ballet). They were developing an art form from the bottom up, starting from the dream of physical and creative freedom and from the utopian visions of American dancers from Isadora Duncan onward. Rejecting the hierarchies of choreographer to company, of performer to audience member, of stage to street, rejecting the linear and narrative line, valuing surprise and shock, even boredom and estrangement, these dancers and their students brought dance and performance into the parks, the gyms, the subways, and onto the roofs and walls of buildings.

As I danced in and with this tradition through my twenties in New York, I was an American dancer. In as much as I have translated these values into language, into how I deal with the line and the page, how I choose one or another utterance, tone, or lexicon, I can say I am an American poet.

In 1989 I watched Steve Paxton and Lisa Nelson perform a dance called "PA RT," Paxton in sunglasses, Nelson in a mustache. The piece was set to a score that included text, and though I have no memory of this text, what I remember is the fact of the language, and the way in which the language and movement came together, or did not. It was loose, it was open, it left a lot to the imagination. This was the beginning of a very particular aesthetic education, one that is, I believe, uniquely American in its love of the unknown and unknowable, the incomplete, the in-progress, the new. I think of that moment of "reading/listening/watching" as an

initiation of sorts, for it prepared me for the work of Ashbery, Cage, Schuyler, Hejinian, MacLow, Myles. That particular aesthetic education that began in theaters and dance studios allows me to read Dickinson, Crane, or Guest in particular ways and pushes me toward the work of my peers that most surprises me, sets me off balance. To be off balance might be a specifically American pleasure.

But this is about style, about form and formlessness, about attitude and curiosity. Content too drives my work, and what is content? The lived experiences of anyone's day (and lived experience includes reading, watching, imagining—as well as doing or being done to). For me lately, that content, the content of the poem and the content of the country, is unavoidably violent, for as we all know and usually remember, America's history begins in violence. I was born at the tail end of the Vietnam War, grew up during a time of race riots on the news, and in my city, Boston. As a child of an activist, I was intensely aware of what we were marching against; that is, I was aware that the threat and reality of violence was everywhere: in my home, in my neighborhood, in my city, throughout my country, and abroad. Having recently moved to Colorado, I've been confronting the legacy of gun violence, in schools, streets, and homes, that in many ways defines the West. As I write this (March, 2010), "protesters" throw bricks through the windows of lawmakers in the name of freedom, in the name of independence. Might there be relationships between the positive values of improvisation, boundary breaking, independence (or "self-reliance:" "I shun father and mother and wife and brother, when my genius calls me. I would write on the lintels of the door-post, Whim") and violence? Might we be bound to explore those relationships in and by way of the poem?

What role do historical and geographical factors play in American poetry? What aspects of your life and identity (gender, ethnicity, etc.) relate to your sense of being a poet in America?

My mother was born in Washington, DC, her grandparents were Jewish immigrants from Latvia and owned and lived above a small grocery store. She was an army brat in the fifties, told not to wear jeans since they might make her pregnant, finished college in three years in order to marry. Later she became a feminist, an anti-war activist, a civil-rights lawyer, and a weaver of blankets. My father was a Western kid, brought up in Arizona, Oregon, Indiana and California. His father was a struggling businessman from the Midwest, his mother a wisecracking former Chautauqua manager, one of a family of ten kids. His maternal grandfather was a farmer, a rancher, a congressman representing the Populist Party, a séance holder, and an atheist. He was the first person who lived in a sod house when elected to the Congress. Thus I inherit some of America's stories, some of its persistent themes: immigration spurned by poverty and persecution, class mobility, the migration from the rural to the urban (and back again), the blending or blurring of ethnicities and religions, the struggle and rise of feminism, activism.

That I am white, that I am female, that I am Jewish, that I am from a middle-class family with roots in the American West and in Latvia and Lithuania, that I am a Democrat, that I have lived in Boston, New York, Berkeley, Oakland, and Denver: none of these seem as clear to me as the fact that I am responsible for raising three children and raising them well. I cannot fully see my American-ness, I struggle to recognize all other aspects of my identity, but I can see that I am a mother because of the bodies of my children. And, as it was not always the case that I was a mother (for I was always American, always female, always white, always Jewish), I can think about it as I cannot honestly think about these other

aspects of myself—these other facets of identity which are invisible mostly to myself, though visible, I assume, to all others.

However, one does not write “as” an anything, other than as a person who knows a language. One writes not to reveal an identity, but to escape one, and, in escaping, to find something previously unknown. The analogy is to swimming: with each stroke, one attempts to reach beyond one’s wake. But in doing so, one is always remaking that wake, redefining the boundaries of one’s moving body. And yet, if I were to claim an identity in writing, it would be the identity of a mother. This is not because motherhood defines or limits me. Rather, it is because the radical loss of the boundaries of the self that parenthood presupposes and demands is a powerful metaphor for what I want my writing to do: to free and to open the edges of what I consider to be myself, to open those edges to influence.

When you consider your “tradition” do you think of American poets in particular? What historical poets do you think most important to American poetry?

My “tradition” includes anything I have read and understood to be powerful. First I read Dickinson as a girl, but then I read Roethke and Whitman. Later, Rich, Levertov, Valentine. Stevens, Williams, Crane, and Stein. Char and Milosz. Akhmatova, Amichai, and Salamun. Hopkins, Keats, Shelley. Coleridge and Wordsworth. Oppen, Niedecker. O’Hara, Ashbery, Schuyler, Notley. Hejinain, Hillman, Swensen, Mullen. Rossetti, Rossetti, and Swinburne. Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé. Now I am reading Inger Christensen, Vallejo, Darwish. And so, with any luck, my tradition grows outward—backward in time (*right* now I am reading the fifteenth-century Vietnamese poet Nguyen Trai), and across seas. Forward in time too, as the poets of the future will be my tradition later. Influence is constant, and the reading of poetry a lifetime of exploration. I want no limits on my reading and no limits on my influence (“to limit it is to kill it” as Williams said). This desire to read it all is perhaps not

very American, given the shocking paucity of available translations (three percent of all books published, as we know). However, voraciousness, for better or for worse, is certainly an American trait, and might, with the help of presses like New Directions, Archipelago, Dalkey Archive, Action Books, Counterpath, and others, direct itself toward more writers from elsewhere. Only then will we have any inkling of what American poetry is.

What are your predictions for American poetry?

Predictions? I should leave all predictions to Frank O'Hara. But in my most optimistic moods I predict more and more people will read poetry and more and more will write it. This spreading out of the genre, aided by technology, will nonetheless be driven by a collective need to save, and be saved by, the voice and the body. Poetry is an art of the body, that is, of the senses: the ear and mouth and eye. Even the most abstract, the most conceptual, the least personal or expressive of poems or poemlike objects emerge under the guidance of someone's hands. We turn to poems in order to counter (and thereby acknowledge) the shame we feel in being human. This shame, which is partnered by pride, is best confronted by the humble affection we have for one another, for that specific and human stranger that can be immediately apprehended in the lines of any poem that does not know exactly what it is.

SRIKANTH REDDY

In what ways might you consider yourself an American poet?

Being an American poet is, for me, an accident of history—something I really have no say in, like being a poet of Indian descent, or being a poet from an upper-middle-class background, or being a balding poet, all of which, incidentally, and accidentally, I am. So being an American poet is,

I feel, nothing to be proud of, and nothing to be ashamed of, either. It's simply a set of ground conditions in which I find myself working. And along with those ground conditions come all sorts of formal, generic, stylistic, and temperamental biases—but I think it's one's job to write against the grain of those conditions. So in a way, I think of myself as an American poet because—like so many other American poets—I'm trying to write my way out of being read as any sort of stereotypically “American” poet.

Do you believe there is anything specifically American about American poetry past and present? Is there American poetry in the sense that there is said to be American painting or American film?

It's hard to put one's finger on any specific feature that one could say characterizes American poetry per se, especially when one thinks about the question historically. I suppose there's a kind of “ambition” in American writers' claims for poetry, beginning of course with Whitman—but present, simultaneously, in Dickinson's examinations of sovereignty and eternity—and running through the magisterial projects of Pound and Stein and Olson and Merrill and Ashbery and all kinds of people in between. That's not to say that a writer like Paul Celan or any number of other poets from other countries aren't ambitious—rather, I think that a certain variety of “ambition” is just the common element in which American poets inevitably must swim from beginning to end.

Can the same be said of American painting or film? I'm not sure. Certainly Italian film like that of Fellini or Picasso's paintings seem as ambitious as anything that's come out of America in those media. So maybe the sort of vague notion of ambition I'm talking about is a distinguishing feature of American poetics as opposed to the other arts in this country. But I wouldn't bet my life on it.

What role do historical and geographical factors play in American poetry and in your work specifically? What other aspects of your life (for instance: gender, sexual preference, class, ethnicity, religious beliefs) relate to your sense of being a poet in America?

For a while I tried to deny the influence of historical and geographical factors on my writing. I felt that it would be fatalistic to simply accept the role of being an “Indian-American” poet without giving my imagination free rein to assume all sorts of different identities in my poems. But I’ve come to feel that certain aspects of being of Indian descent and an American citizen may actually open up the possibility of trying out different identities in ways that wouldn’t otherwise be available to me. The classic rhetorical formulation of American poetry, Whitman’s “I am this, I am that,” is a version of Krishna’s theophanic revelation in the Bhagavad Gita, in which the divinity says to his disciple “I am this, I am that” in precisely the same fashion. So being an American poet, and being a poet of Indian heritage, doesn’t necessarily shut down one’s possibilities of being in the world. It may actually multiply those possibilities far beyond what one could have ever imagined in the absence of history and geography.

Is there something formally distinctive about American poetry?

No, I don’t think there’s anything formally distinctive about American poetry. In fact, if anything, the most distinctive feature of American poetry lies in its radical diversity. Traditional European forms like the sonnet, imported Asian forms like the haiku and the ghazal, experimental forms like projective writing or chance operations—the field of formal options available to an American poet writing today is truly vast to the point of bewilderment.

What significance does popular culture possess in your sense of American poetry?

I think popular culture has a pretty significant presence in a lot of American poetry, especially the poems written by younger writers. One reason for this is that popular culture might be the last lingua franca for readers of the art today. Certainly more readers will recognize a reference to *The Sopranos* than will register a citation of Spenser or somebody else who's been dead a long time. That's okay, I guess—it's a new common fund of cultural reference and all that—but I do feel a fuddy-duddy sadness at the loss of older sorts of music from Chaucer and Shakespeare and Milton and whatnot. Still, popular culture does bring in new kinds of music, which is to the good of the art.

When you consider your own "tradition," do you think of American poets, non-American poets? Which historic poets do you consider most responsible for generating distinctly American poetics?

When I think of my own personal pantheon of writers, I do think of many American poets—Stevens, Eliot, Ashbery—but the funny thing is that each of these writers was deeply influenced by the poetry of a foreign culture. (In Eliot's case, the influence came from many foreign cultures.) But I also think of poets from countries abroad, like Keats and Dante, and poems from other traditions, like "The Mahabharata," which looms larger and larger in my mind these days. So I like to think of myself as a "world poet," ultimately—and I'd have to add that this isn't anything special about me, as it seems to me that the majority of poets working today are world writers in some sense, and that many writers from the past (like Eliot, for example) fall into this category as well.

What are your predictions for American poetry in the next century?

I'm no Nostradamus, but I'd imagine that American poetry will more and more become continuous with something like a "world poetry" in the next century. At least, I hope that's the case. The growing interest in translation in this country, and the increasing skepticism regarding nationalism, seem to me augurs of a sort of globalization in the field of poetry and poetics. Of course, there may occur some problems analogous with our current difficulties with economic globalization—the erasure of regional identities, etc.—which we'll have to be aware of and sensitive towards. But on the whole I think this will be a good thing. The de-Americanization of American poetry!

DANIELLE PAFUNDA

Where "American" is descriptive of "poet," that's me. Eight hours of television a day! In first grade, my music collection consisted of Cyndi Lauper's *She's So Unusual*, Madonna's self-titled *Madonna*, and Michael Jackson's *Thriller*. *The Shining*, *Mommie Dearest*, *A Chorus Line*. Loved! Somebody's going to say, oh, that's "pop culture" as though it was less real (to me) than other things—family, the pastoral landscape, science.

Designer jeans, junk food, Cornell boxes, New England in the fall, V. C. Andrews, *Twin Peaks*, valley girl slang, Riot Grrrl, the Beat poets, *Headbangers Ball*, new wave, fashion fashion fashion. I'm made out of this stuff. I'm made out of other stuff, too, of course (gobs of Russian literature, Japanese horror flicks, gelato, macabre Irish tall tales), but this is the stuff in which I felt/feel at home.

The modern poets' vernacular: Emily Dickinson, John Berryman, Sylvia Plath. LeRoi Jones. Gwendolyn Brooks. Frank O'Hara. Gertrude Stein.

The tension between the Puritan and excess. From Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative, "[a]s we went along they killed a *Deer*, with a young one in her, they gave me a piece of the *Fawn*, and it was so young and tender, that one might eat the bones as well as the flesh, and yet I thought it very good." This is how a nation is born.

That particular kind of American gothic, the kind that relies on fresher corpses, penitentiaries rather than castles, slang, barnyards, sprawling urban desolation.

We get giddy creating genealogies, mapping stuff. Each one has his/her/hir own *Spoon River Anthology*.

All that baggage. Our people came here under duress. My people, all Jews and Catholics, running from hunger or running with money from death or just running round.

Delia, oh Delia. How can it be?

Most of our poems come out under duress. We want to take pictures, feel happy, drink a lot of coffee, and have ideas. I'm writing this and watching the poet's film, the filmmaker's film, the poems. Everything's so multi, which annoys, makes my teeth hurt, but also exactly what I wanted. I'm wearing a lot of makeup and a cocktail hat. When you see me.

The cheerful nihilism, or the morbid optimism. Yippee-ki-yay. Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* is a great American lyric. It's for us, for the president, anyone can read it. You can hear the television. The static. You can practically wrap that twisting thread of hope around your finger—that thin, metallic thread twisting through all the grim recognition. The hope in the hopelessness. It's not goofy when she does it.

I'm guilty of our solipsism, ethnocentrism, consumerism. I'm guilty of the mall.

Second wave feminism. Our civil rights movement. Our gay rights movement. Our punk, our avant-garde. Mine mine mine. When did we stop making film strips? When did we give up on the nostalgia of click shudder click click?

Donna Haraway is cheerier than Derrida. Anna Tsing embraces the maggot-strewn border Kristeva recoils from. Judith Butler, Judith Halberstam, Sianne Ngai. All those *Ugly Feelings*.

I'm living out on the high plains, now. The last vestige of frontier. Beth Loffreda, in *Losing Matt Shepard*: "[r]ecently some researchers have argued that the old frontier persists in America, demographically speaking anyway. If you categorize as 'frontier' counties with fewer than six people per square mile, then 77 percent of Wyoming still falls into that lonely condition..." Who settles here? Broke-down wagon trains? Military units? Laramie wasn't habitable, by American Indians or settlers, year-round until the technology made it possible.

Not entirely possible. We lose people. What's frightening or deadly, just outside the picture window, but a thing we can ignore every day. The snow comes down. I hold the baby. The baby looks up at me with his big American eyes. I've made more Americans.

Diner breakfast, insomnia, anxiety. All the bad feelings about how big and beyond my control this place is, the big mess of government, the cruelty. The poverty and bad health care, the kind of diseases we get here.

My fibromyalgia. Such an American disease. Chronic pain, unglamorous pain. Too much substance P in my spine, whatever that is. And yet I can't

stop being cheerful. I can't stop rushing headlong into the "future" looking for improvements, every little item designed right down to the pins.

Isolationism and ethnocentrism, or exoticism and ethnocentrism. We're tourists. A little Mayakovsky here, a little Artaud there. Do you know the names of women poets from other nations? Have you been reading the whole book? We love the foreign writers who love us, those wastrels in some terrible cell, or dusting it up in a bar fight abroad. This is, in case I'm being unclear, not cool. But our bizarre inbreeding tendencies aren't without fascination.

There's something distinctive about the way we adapt forms. The prose poem or Oulipo-type projects, haiku or the sonnet, they all pull a bit of the newscaster accent. That is, our Amerispeaks gobbling things into the machine in omnivorous fashion. And there's the delight with which we stumble on the new and co-opt it. Say what you will about the capitalism, American poets are all thieves who at heart believe *property* is theft.

At home in or at odds with artifice. Poetry as the medium or strategy, and pop culture as the product *and* plastic. Susan Bordo:

[. . .]in my view, feminist cultural criticism is not a blueprint for the conduct of personal life[. . .]and does not empower (or require) individuals to "rise above" their culture *or* become martyrs to feminist ideals. It does not tell us what to do[. . .]Its goal is edification and understanding, enhanced *consciousness* of the power, complexity, and *systemic* nature of culture, the interconnected webs of its functioning. It is up to the reader to decide how, when, and where (or whether) to put that understanding to further use, in the particular, complicated, and ever-changing context that is his or her life and no one else's.

We're all DJs these days. So, I'd say anyone who got any significant airplay, s/z/he's in the lineage. And there's more coming. The "American" may very well become a less crucial qualifier, but the national attachment to poetry more intense. Yes, the stodgy and buzzkill will continue to flip out about the dangerous volume and difficulty of sifting through all the "bad" poetry (on the Interwebs!). How impossible to get to the "great" poetry, whatever that is! The haters, within and without, are no longer relevant. Whew. Poems and films are becoming less distinct one from the other. Poems and cyborgs have intimate rhizomatic connections. Poetry will still be written about everything about which it is already written, but also everything about which it has not been written. Those of us who conceive of the poem as otherworldly architecture will be grateful for holograms. I'm a little worried that there will be *actual* ghosts in poetry, but in the "future" maybe I will be one, braver, or two, ghostlier. The body is a construction, the poem is a construction, the self is a construction, and in triangulation they allow us access to the "real," the "artificial," the "artificial real," that is—the spectacle mishmash! And each other. I love poetry. I really really adore it. Thanks for inviting me to this survey, because, seriously, when the aliens or the future babies or whosoever find this document, I want them to know POETRY WAS LOVED.

BRENT CUNNINGHAM

In what ways might you consider yourself an American poet?

I maintain, with effort, a typically American belief that the strict determinations of class, gender, and race can be at least partly transcended by sustained self-reflection and thought. Experience has made me a cultural relativist and I believe, contrary to a lot of Americans, that we're obviously constructed creatures more than essential ones. But I still contend there's an elusive and problematic paradox in all stricter models of social

and cultural determination. This certainly shows up in my work, where the value for speculative thought is generally higher than the value for realism or even analysis.

Also my interest in European literature and culture is typically American. Also I like yelling.

Do you believe there is anything specifically American about American poetry past and present? Is there American poetry in the sense that there is said to be American painting or American film?

If the question is whether there's anything identifiable or even *cohesive* in American poetry as such, then I'd say no: poetry is always an argument, a site of disagreement, ongoingly, and thankfully. At the same time it's my sense—and I say this knowing it's basically impossible to have an overview of something you're also inside of—that there might be a particular shading to how that aesthetic argument gets played out in America. For instance in the United States there is a widespread and rather Puritanical belief in the direct association of word and act, in language as mimetic of being. Thus, on the one hand the American avant-garde seems more anxious than in other countries to believe radical writing is a type of radical political action; meanwhile, more conventional poetic camps are almost casual in their presumption that aesthetic works reflect underlying moral realities. In resistance to both those poles there's also a fervent denial among some American poets that language and reality have any mimetic relation at all. Somewhere in the triangulation of those disagreements is what, to me, is structurally American about our literary debates.

What role do historical and geographical factors play in American poetry and in your work specifically? What other aspects of your life (gender, sexual

preference, class, ethnicity, religious beliefs) relate to your sense of being a poet in America?

Like in a bad Eddie Murphy film, historical and geographical factors have played almost all the roles in my work, just as they play almost all the roles in American poetry. These can be exceedingly difficult things to track all the way through (i.e., being a straight white man has been absolutely determining for me, but exactly how is harder to say). In terms of my poetry I'd say that class is probably the overbearing factor, both the thing that troubles it and that materially enables it. Poetry does require some measure of leisure time after all, and leisure is never free.

Is there something formally distinctive about American poetry?

Nope. (See above.)

What significance does popular culture possess in your sense of American poetry?

Even though most of the allusions in my work aren't current, I do enjoy poets who use pop culture in their writing. But whether they use the material approvingly or critically, I find it always also implies the problem of American poetry's marginalization, even if the writers don't realize it themselves. What does "popular" even mean if you're a poet? Much of American culture only makes sense of art as a contest for the largest audience, so it must only be the distorted or broken people, the non-people, that spend their life tinkering on an obscure form. In that sense, poetry in America is one vast slippage, where our model of human desire shows itself to be fundamentally imperfect, because despite the overpowering logic of audience people do keep showing up to write poetry and be poets. It's the same thing when you see people vote against their own self-interest, as frustrating as that can be to watch: you realize the psyche is murkier

than the models allow, and we don't evidently know how desires, social interactions, or passions really work. Popular culture is, like anything, material to a poet, a device—the question is whether it's used to pry at this other problem of inadequate models. To me, any poetry that isn't addressing problems of epistemological slippage, the breaks in our assumptions, reads as a branch of journalism rather than a branch of art.

When you consider your own “tradition,” do you think of American poets, non-American poets? Which historic poets do you consider most responsible for generating distinctly American poetics?

I think of all the poets, American and non-American, who were restless for *something else* to enter poetry. Not novelty exactly, but something unexpected, even if it's only boredom and their own demons that drive them to that need. My recommended reading list runs to hundreds of pages but William Carlos Williams is a pretty obvious answer when the question is asked this way. Therefore, for perversion's sake, I'll nominate instead a poet Williams gives surprisingly high praise to in his *In the American Grain*. Forevermore, the poet who generated our distinctly American poetics shall be Edgar Allan Poe (but only if translated back into English from the French of Baudelaire).

What are your predictions for American poetry in the next century?

I think it'll be a beautiful and engaging demise.

ARIELLE GREENBERG

In what ways might you consider yourself an American poet?

In all ways, which is to say, I think that as a poet I have many stereotypically American traits, for better and for worse. At the risk of using too broad a stroke (but isn't that tendency also so typically American?!) in how I paint the American sensibility, I consider myself an American poet because of the way I fill my work with my untempered enthusiasms, my confessionalism, my wide-ranging referencing of culture high and low (but mostly low), my interest in consumerism and race and class and gender and sex, my love of vernacular and folk diction, my sometimes naive and idealistic views, my sense of humor, my self-centeredness, my love of the outdoors and food and movies and rock music. (My repeated use of the word "my" is pretty typically American, too, I think. Unfortunately for me and America both.)

I would also propose that the way my poetry feels comfortable moving fluidly between while pointing to the juxtapositions of dictions, historical eras, languages, and identities may be in keeping with the American sense of (shifting, continually reinvented) selfhood.

Finally, there is the fact that I use the word "American" a lot in my poetry. I'm serious. The word "American" stirs me.

Do you believe there is anything specifically American about American poetry past and present? Is there American poetry in the sense that there is said to be American painting or American film?

Oh, I think so, yes. The American poets I love most—and I mostly love American poets; this clumsy patriotism, isolationism and near-sightedness is also American of me, I think!—make much use of American landscapes, dialects, idioms, and folk cultures. I'm thinking of a poet like C. D. Wright or C. S. Giscombe here. There's also a way that I think American poets can balance mystery and earthiness that feels particular to our culture, our way of looking at the world—openly, brashly, and with wonder—so

that an American surrealism or ellipiticism or whatever you'd like to call it feels quite distinct to me from the Eastern European or Mexican or Scandinavian versions of this poetics. And here I am thinking of poets like Michael Burkard, Jean Valentine, Kate Greenstreet, Brenda Coultas—some of my favorites—whose work walks that line between the fantastic and the real, the felt and the found, the crafted and the messy.

What role do historical and geographical factors play in American poetry and in your work specifically? What other aspects of your life (for instance: gender, sexual preference, class, ethnicity, religious beliefs) relate to your sense of being a poet in America?

This question makes me wonder if I am actually a poet *because* of my deep yearning to connect to history and to region. I think I might be.

I do think the imagery in my work changed pretty dramatically when I moved from the Northeast, and its architecture and rolling landscape and city streets, to those of Chicago and the Midwest. I also feel like the differences in how black and white racial history played out in Chicago versus New York or Boston has impacted some of my poetry pretty strongly.

And yes, I am an American Jewish middle-class woman poet, married with kids, in my life and in my poetry and in my life as a poet. More specifically, I am a third-generation Ashkenazi-Jewish American by way of Ellis Island, Brooklyn, and Queens, and I am the kind of mother who has a hybrid car pasted with organic food- and homebirth-related bumper stickers, etc. All of my identity politics and values come to bear on my poetry. I am mindful of those factors, and the privilege and vantage points and biases they entail. In fact, I think that even when I am not so mindful of those factors in my actual life, my poetry often waves them in my face.

My poetry can be some rather red, white, and blue bunting sometimes. And sometimes it is armchair liberalism. And sometimes it takes responsibility for its subject position, but not as often as it should.

What significance does popular culture possess in your sense of American poetry?

Well, I would never assume or ask that all American poets refer to popular culture, but it is true that when I have poetry students whose work bears no evidence of existing in a certain place or time, no roots in a history or a particular culture, I tend to call them out on it. Even if it is through dipping deep into our American well, as Dan Beachy-Quick or Maurice Manning do, I like to see some evidence of knowing what it means to have washed up on these shores.

And personally, I certainly can't write very long without some movie or folk song or bit of fairground cotton candy floating through my lines. And I think I tend to seek out poetry by others who feel the same.

When you consider your own "tradition," do you think of American poets, non-American poets? Which historic poets do you consider most responsible for generating distinctly American poetics?

As I said above, I think of my own tradition as being almost entirely American, to my pride and shame.

As for historic, distinctly American poetics, lots of people will say Whitman and Dickinson here, right? I will say Dickinson and Whitman. I will say Gertrude Stein and Lorine Niedecker and Frank O'Hara and Gwendolyn Brooks and Sharon Olds and Bernadette Mayer and Alice Notley and Cathy Wagner and Cathy Park Hong. (I am thinking of playfulness, boldness, chattiness, openness, epicness and brevity. I am

also just thinking of some of the American poets I've read a bunch.) And I will say that any such list I start to make will be a failure, because the whole point of a distinctly American poetics is its polyglot, multicultural wideness: its containment of multitudes. (So back to Whitman again. Ah, well. He does have it going on.)

What are your predictions for American poetry in the next century?

I have no idea. All I know is I aim to be a good reader of poetry as the years pass, which would mean that throughout my life I would be continually thrilled, surprised, and delighted by American poetry's ever-burgeoning possibilities.

MONOGAMY

Rosa Alcalá

for JS

to crave dismemberment
in a crowd
or to piece together
ghosts
and fuck
their little see-through
parts

(Entropy)

holding yourself
to sleep
your arms pass
through your chest and into
Ohio, then
Boston

THE GOLDEN AGE

After a line by Judah Adashi

Anna Maria Hong

Why pretty man no smile? If I were
as beautiful as you, I surely would
not be so glum. No, no. If I had your
round-eye, infant blues and Afghan blood

or whatever genetic mix makes you look goy,
I'd touch myself all over two or three
times a day, and I would thoroughly enjoy
the company. Yes, yes. Indeed. Mais oui.

I am as beautiful as you and maybe
even a tiny bit more. So now you know
how I spend my free time. Perhaps we should

make some cute little hapa babies,
but only if we can do this in vitro,
since sex is untidy and also you're married.

LATIN MASS

The Buddhists have a saying: One soul's engine is another's combustion. The Buddhists are nice guys. Some Zen ones don't even drive. When men of the cloth take a spin, figures of speech splice.

Giaour is "infidel" but not in Christian.
In Christian, it means "time well spent" or "fire consumed." In Jewish, it connotes "to be the piston."
In Hindu, it becomes "tight like a tire."

In Heathen, we have a word for spirit that has no equivalent in this milieu.
Actually, we have two. The first is "Hear it clicking, pull over before it kills you."

The second is something like "The wheel that rides a lot of small connected wheels."

FARRAH IN FLORIDA

Kazim Ali

she sees in threes
what you think

lost and losing
shy at a dinner party, hungry

through insufferable seasons
praying for nothing

body of sound, folding clothes
the collage of a lunch date and ebbing autumn

deaf in an ancient tradition
now is the time to yes

speak in foreign syllables
who you are

a bird body that went from strength
to self, broken to birthing

where you will be everywhere
or evaporating into air

no one can explain lake effect like you
you think you're in the clear

but what you thought
drifts in to keep you warm

land-locked and tropical you think you might be lonely
but all the frosty atoms cluster up and visit you

THE NERVOUS ENTERTAINMENT

Eileen Myles

for Cathy

just when I
thought I should
break it up
the other one
licked from
across the
room. A red
echo, and a blue
one slithered
on the star
leg of an
eames type
office chair

I saw
a rainbow in
a gush today
soft green
mountain I
couldn't write
about cause
my recorder
kept checking
itself &
wouldn't work.

I'm happy
cause I don't
work. I'm like
a band that
tours people's
houses playing
when they're
not around

when Cathy
said I love
poetry I thought
well that's
cause it's
going to happen
here. It's
gonna contain
that remark. After
it enjoys
your fire. When
Cathy said wait
till you see
the morning I said
I'm excited
though it sounded
like *I*
was dead.

I don't have
a working voice
I just have
a voice that

comes out the
way it
wants apart
from me. I think
of voices
I admire & try
to use
them & you
know how
your friends'
shirts are.
Sometimes
it does look
good. These
jeans are
dead. They're
getting re-
placed.

Though not till
after
I finish
my novel.
Robert Walser
did huge
things in
tiny spaces.
If I say
thank you
at one
more gas
station

I'm going to start
believing oil
is god. But
it's when

I'm still
in the
landscape
the numbers flip
the land is
great

YOUR NAME

It's very hard
to hunt
from indoors
I'll say that for
you. And
text is
at best
an attenuated
warning
sound has
a range
of many desires
not just map.
I subscribe
to the grandpa
bunny bunny school
of theory
I mean genesis
to write
is a form
of accounting
& approximate
promise
in the sunny
mouth of
time. A horny
bet. Or else
hunters
lolling around the fire
what did you

get. How can
I avoid it.
This “making
a speech.” Long limbed
& maybe
in July. Aren’t
we lucky to have
captured each
other in this
hideous neon light.

PAINT AND PATRIARCHY

Scott Zieher

In a piano-stride of clouds we learn of local hues—
Second fiddle hides his bitten hands
In rough, woolen trousers

And the father floats before the son
As liquid forms above and breezes form below
Trebling the elder's echo.

Not bound by alpha or end
But halt by the difference
Between horns and halos.

Sleep is trismus and sleep is meniscus.
They carve on the cave anyway
Scratching like matters of fact.

Still submerged and still heaven-bound
And always present—the son
Conceives a greener, human tree

That sprouts an argument of leaves
Each made of strokes as fine as the single hair
That limns their vision onto paper.

Oily and onionskin thin, ever-wide and all-consuming
As the clenching of these two mawmsey men
To her ample middle

Hanging hollow as a box of empty bottles.

IT IS CRUCIAL TO BE ABLE TO SPOT ONE

Eric Ekstrand

A nemesis is not quite
An animal, it is the premise
Of an animal where nothing

Is fullform. If you have here

And here a nemesis,
Then you have two frames
Over which the total lusts

And bodies of animals

Have almost been laid.
They enter rooms
As inexactly as anxieties

Or children. It is much more

Like a nemesis that the ancients
Chiseled there every abstract
Polyp of totems and every

Generalized hair.

A nemesis has genitals
Like the approximate
Genitals of prepubescents

In their nightclothes. Nemeses'

Underdemonstrated legs—
If the chief merit of language
Is clearness, their movements

Are difficult

To find, limber as dusks.
What could be more
Indistinct than fur?

The nemeses have found

A way. Their pounds
Are in the woods among
Their meals. The hoop

Of the anus, it is a sorrowful

Feeling. Hard to say
What kind of butcher
A nemesis would take.

If you hear its sounds

They might be sounds
From other places
And in what way precisely

Have they been misconstrued?

Is it like how the skin
Was misconstrued as pink
Or gray? Their corners get lost

In the eye, but

What I'm sure of is
How much more alike
One is to men's suppressions.

This man's.

COFFIN

Seth Landman

There is nothing. There is your city.
Right there, the streets out of sight.
Call me a little, pausing funeral; hats off
to the feet set going, the chief element of landscape.
There is nothing. There is the roasted river
when I go, a hand on the universal shoulder
in the face of invisible surveillance, secret dogs,
unaccountable influences. There is nothing
in not ignoring it. What is good? My curiosity
sways on an island with sounds. Things with seas.
Quick and still with wild, inmost, endless,
grand disguises. I am here exactly on this
stage, and there is nothing looming
in the world like snow on the hill in the air.

ACROSS FROM THE SHRINE

Becca Klaver

One red brick building

wears the gown

of another red brick building

awkwardly

A sky to fog your mirror

You went nowhere

let the town come to you, spilling

a hot drink in your lap

It felt like burning

It felt like love

You went nowhere

The skies caved for you the skies were orange

and grey for you

West was where the water was

(turnabout)

You went to town

to see town had skipped

in its stead

storefront churches with names

spraypainted in a language

you pretended you couldn't read

You read the sky waited for particles to seize up

for the haze to harden

in just one take to something you could slice

ATTACK ON MORALS

Aimé Césaire

Hard night long pole night without stars. I am on very bad terms with space. So what. Dirty night crazed tree rag I am on very bad terms with Time. So what? Farther than the mirror farther than all life reviewed in the accident where it surges very rapidly farther than forgotten cities farther than rites with forgotten meanings farther even than the ostrich that carries the letters I pretend not to write farther than my little horse that I jealously hide because it fled each and every race farther than the gold pieces that the sun's brain scatters in the hovel's thought farther than the tall white gloves that summits put on to greet the wind
your gaze plunge it, Monster, into the validity of an abyss fed by a fish tank of monsters

I am on very bad terms with space very bad terms with Time. So what. Across the journey frequented by a high fumigation of whiplashes on a pavement made of little shipwrecks thwarting towns where allerions vegetate enshrined like saints in the noble postures of paludism stumbling—at his belt a clicking of keys that by way of doors open only onto the python corridor the same after all that opens to the bad weather inevitably in from the Atlantic—a beggar tolls in the street which as if indifferently encircles with rock salt the massive energy of darkness while compact masses of pirate icebergs tack toward Ostende

TRANSMUTATION

A tree thrusts against a wall its quarrel of twisted pipe
in the absence of any objective reference the cataracts have hung in their
windows the laundry that hygienic women soil with their menses to such
an extent that nothing is more personal than the sacking of time
the tanned necks of prostitutes alone still give meaning to the infinite
However much I point out that I have not proved unworthy they leave
me alone

defense a storm screams at me incessantly
always foretold always deferred nourishing the unconscious of our crowds
with all the peripeteia of nightmare

Happily they did not notice that I noticed that I have my hands to keep
me company I have my monkey tail hands I have my booby-trap hands I
have my assassin hands I have my sleepwalker hands and sometimes when
my pulse beats the lapse of remorse risen from Atlantis I have my shell
hands I also have my guano hands that are so lovely they are called Sierra
Nevadas I have my "pigeon flies" hands I have my diving-suit hands I also
have my hands for rocking the little children who come to me since my most
spiritual exercise consists in trying to stop myself I have righteous hands
which effected by mildew never become mature my incendiary hands my
bicolored hands my miliary fever hands my generally insignificant hands
my pearl diver hands that are accustomed to the depths

For rainy days I have my curious eared seal hands that I will not describe
for that would be a sacrilege

On feast days I have these sumptuous hands that the old emperor donned
in Cuzco to greet the sun I have my hands that are mirrors for setting fire
to my hands to serve as a scarecrow for the birds of the solstice

DWELLING I

Screw you jailer
fever with its razzia dagger in its teeth fever with its torrential word in
its teeth
fever thoroughbred horse sweet falcon
with its palanquin preceding me
Dwelling made of defeats
dwelling made of living ships' hulls
dwelling made of passionflower
dwelling made and remade a hundred times
dwelling made of sharks' teeth
ah hallowed dwelling made of flashing hell and damnation
of somber saps dozing in my massive ceibas
the screaming curse upon me no longer exists
the chain evil that checks our ankles
the iron collar evil that presses heavily on our shoulders
all that has been dissipated stripped away like this kernel
dissipated like the bay catching the light of fine weather in the noise bowl
of the sea
stripped bare like you Volcano who at the peak of your crime hurl yourself
into suicide to rejoin in the sea's depths your accomplices the pensive
porpoises yet to be born and who wait

Translated from the French by A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman.

CRESCENDO

Rickey Laurentiis

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA
AUGUST, 2005

But I'm trying hard to know what
is meant when we claim *O silent night*—
a night like this, when blown out is all
the blaze of the sky but not heat, not
dampness either, not even that star, alone,
like a crack in the firmament (*in the levees*)
and what floods in, because only it can,
is a light to make light of until we can't—
then a breeze passes, with its humanlike
moan, since it's human I can know it, I hear it,
as I do the magnolia-shudder, the bird
-scatter, as I do the river: can't you hear it
singing far off—?

Then not as far—?

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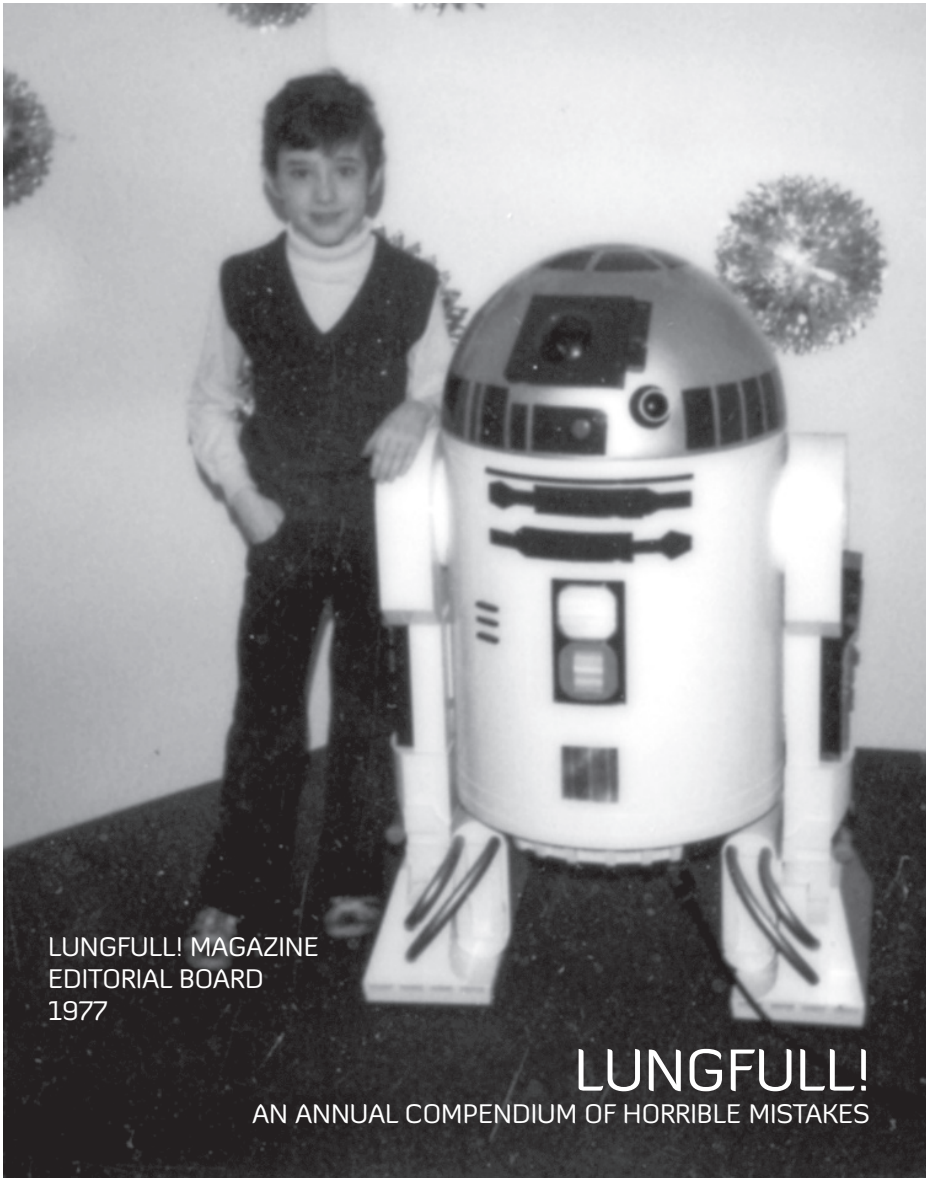
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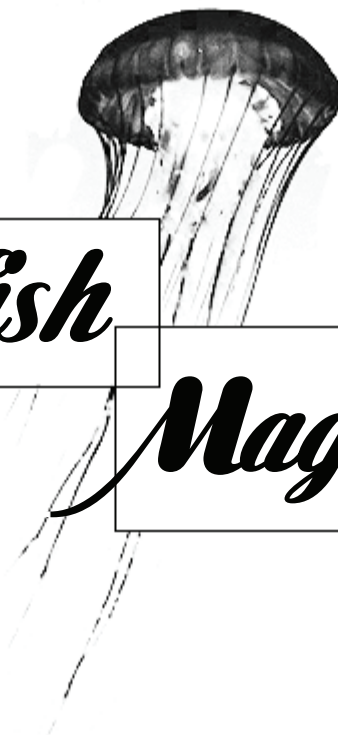
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-from "I am a Natural Wonder,"
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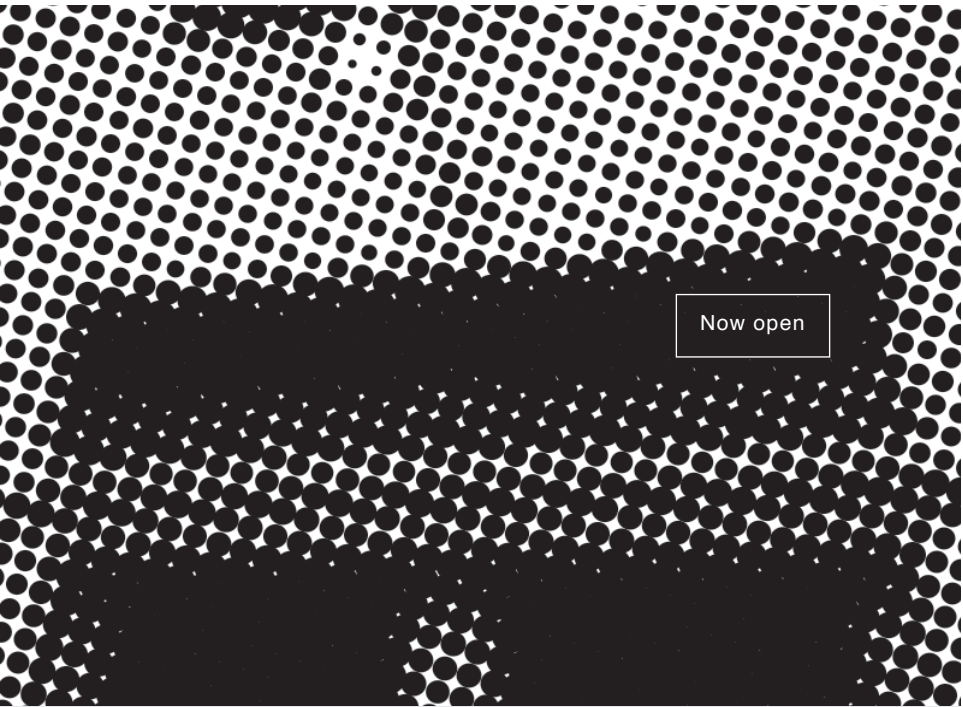


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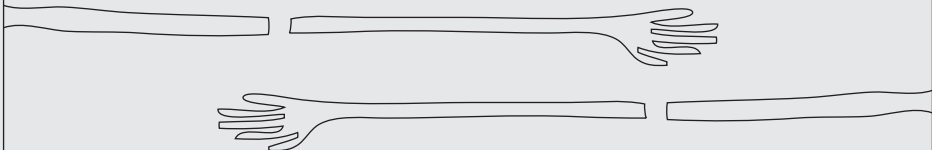
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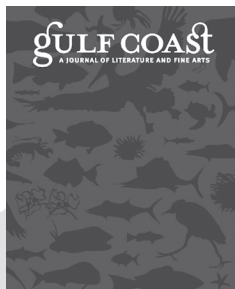
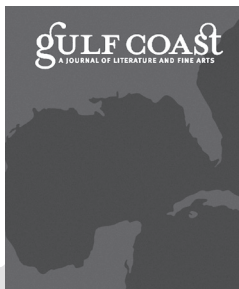
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